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THE MINE RUN CAMPAIGN--AN OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS
OF MAJOR GENERAL GEORGE G. MEADE

BY

LIEUTENANT COLONEL KAVIN L. COUGHENOUR

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USAWC MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM PAPER

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OF MAJOR GENERAL GEORGE G. MEADE
AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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U.S. Army War College
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania 17013
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THE MINE RUN CAMPAIGN-AN OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS OF MAJOR
GENERAL GEORGE G. MEADE

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Major General (MG) George Gordan Meade was the fourth and final commanding general of the Army of the Potomac during the American Civil War. He assumed command during the Gettysburg Campaign (28 June 1863) and, subsequently, led the army until its demobilization on 27 June 1865.¹ Conducted from October to December 1863, the Mine Run Campaign was Meade's first army level offensive operation. Generally, little study has been devoted to this campaign because of its inconclusive results. The campaign is so obscure that Bruce Catton chose to ignore it completely in his bestselling three volume history of the Army of the Potomac published in 1954.² A 1969 magazine article entitled "The Campaign That History Forgot" rescued the campaign from permanent historical seclusion.³ Notwithstanding the obscurity and lackluster results of the Mine Run Campaign, it is an excellent vehicle for the analysis of the actions and thought process of an army commander at the operational level of war.

OPERATIONAL LEVEL OF WAR

While the American Civil War raged, the Prussian Army was beginning to isolate the concept of the operational art. The resulting German term Operativ is an adjective that is difficult to translate into English. John Keegan, a British military historian, describes it as,

Lying somewhere between 'strategic' and 'tactical', it describes the process of transforming paper plans into battlefield practice, against the tactical pressures of time which the strategist does not know, and has been regarded by the German Army as the most difficult of the commander's arts since it was isolated by von Moltke in the 1860's.⁴

The United States Army added the concept of the operational art into its doctrine with the publication of Field Manual 100-5 in May 1986.⁵

Even though the term did not enter the American military lexicon until this century, this does not mean that all previous American Generals were unaware of the concept. As the commanding general of the largest Federal field army actively campaigning against Confederate forces in Virginia and Maryland, Meade clearly grappled with warfare at the operational level. In 1863 he faced many of the campaign planning concerns that challenge modern theater commanders today. For instance, Meade had to devise a theater strategy based on the guidance he received from Washington. He had to determine the centers of gravity of the Confederate forces and he had to anticipate friendly and enemy actions well beyond his

current situation. Meade had to deal with operational sustainment issues involving the interface of his combat and logistical activities. Additionally, Meade had to consider his lines of support and lines of communication. Finally, Meade had to maneuver and fight his corps which involved the movement of large formations of troops over great distances.

CAMPAIGN ANALYSIS

There is no exact template for the study of a military campaign at the operational level. The model applied in this paper is fashioned after that developed by Colonel C.F.R. Henderson, a nineteenth century British military writer. Henderson applied General Carl von Clausewitz's critical method to his own writings and rejected the technique of blandly applying military principles to campaign analysis. Instead, Henderson placed himself within a battle commander's decision cycle and tried to envision how the commander perceived the situation. In this way Henderson was able to focus on thought processes and reactions, thereby, giving the reader a unique analytical view.⁶ Commenting on Napoleon Bonaparte's study of classical campaigns, Henderson said,

...he found in those campaigns a complete study of human nature under the conditions that exist in war; human nature affected by discipline, by fear, by the need of food, by want of confidence, by over-confidence, by the weight of responsibility, by political interests, by patriotism, by distrust, and by many other things.⁷

Using this methodology this paper follows Meade through the Mine Run Campaign and reviews his plans and reactions at major decision points. To do this some excursions into tactical operations will be necessary.

MILITARY SCIENCE ISSUES CONFRONTING MEADE

In order to better understand the type of combat that Meade faced in the Mine Run Campaign, it is necessary to consider four of the most consuming military science issues of 1863.

Command and Control

As an army commander Meade could not expect to ever see more than a small portion of the battlefield or be able to exercise direct personal leadership over more than one or two of his corps commanders "in any period of two or three hours."⁸ He could select an approach route for his corps and divisions commanders. However, once contact with the enemy was made it was the corps and division commanders who decided whether or not to deploy in line of battle.⁹ Most of his orders were verbal and were not always followed up by written orders. These verbal orders were delivered around the battlefield by aide-de-camps (ADC) and mounted orderlies; therefore, the accuracy and timeliness of his communications depended on the ability of these messengers to navigate around the battlefield-a most hazardous proposition in the era before smokeless powder. Even though the telegraph and aerial observation balloon made their debut during the Civil War, the speed

of Meade's communications on the battlefield was no faster than the speed of a horse.¹⁰

As part of commanding the Army of the Potomac Meade had "a sprawling headquarters organization to supervise, including experts in many specialized branches such as administration, filing, military law, signals and logistics, not to mention engineering and gunnery."¹¹

Strength returns during the Mine Run Campaign show that Meade's General Headquarters numbered 3,077 officers and men assigned and attached. This large organization included the staff (approximately 123 officers), orderlies, provost guards, signal corps, and engineer troops.¹² Driven by a lack of trained staff officers, staff work in the Army of the Potomac suffered. Like other Civil War generals Meade attempted to compensate for this shortfall by appointing staff assistants who had no prior military experience.¹³ One such appointee was Theodore Lyman, who served Meade as a Voluntary ADC during the Mine Run Campaign. Lyman's letters to his wife provide some interesting insights into Meade's headquarters.¹⁴

Intelligence

A tradition among commanders of the Army of the Potomac was to overestimate the strength of the enemy. Fed by the specious reports of Allan Pinkerton in late 1861, MG George B. McClellan had become obsessed with the notion that he was outnumbered by Confederate forces by a

factor of three-to-one.¹⁵ By the fall of 1863 Meade had developed a more pragmatic view of the strength of the Army of Northern Virginia. His estimate of the enemy strength at the time of Mine Run was 50,000 to 60,000 men.

Meade had a variety of sources available for tactical and operational intelligence. For tactical intelligence he relied on his picket lines, his signal men manning semaphore stations, and his cavalry.¹⁶ He received operational intelligence from his Bureau of Military Information, headed by Deputy Provost Marshall, Colonel (COL) George H. Sharpe. When Pinkerton left the army with McClellan in November 1862, his intelligence organization rapidly dissolved. On 30 March 1863 the Bureau of Military Information was reactivated by MG Joseph Hooker with Sharpe in charge. Sharpe's resulting organization was very secretive and consisted of scouts, special agents and signal men, who were kept in constant motion collecting human intelligence (HUMINT).¹⁷ Other sources of intelligence available to Meade were deserters, prisoners and interestingly enough newspapers.¹⁸

Although he had multiple intelligence sources available to him, Meade had to be the final judge of all information received. Barbara Tuchman aptly describes the intelligence dilemma that all commanders face as follows:

Men will not believe what does not fit in with their plans or suit their prearrangements. The flaw in all military intelligence, whether twenty or fifty or one hundred percent accurate, is that it is no better than the judgment of

its interpreters, and this judgment is the product of a mass of individual, social, and political biases, prejudices, and wishful thinkings: in short, it is human and therefore fallible.¹⁹

Fire and Maneuver

By 1863 the rifled musket firing the cylindro conoidal Minie ball was having a decided affect on forms of maneuver. The resultant increased range and accuracy added potent firepower to the infantry formations of both Northern and Southern armies.²⁰ Tactical offensive operations were proving too costly in terms of casualties when directed against defenders armed with rifled weapons capable of killing effectively at 500+ yards. When the defenders occupied strong field entrenchments the results were especially devastating.²¹ Meade had experienced the effects of these innovations as an attacker at Fredericksburg and as a defender at Gettysburg. By the time of the Mine Run Campaign he fully understood the consequences of attacking prepared positions. Therefore, it is not hard to understand why Meade's scheme of maneuver during the Mine Run campaign featured an attempt to turn General (GEN) Robert E. Lee's flank and avoid the frontal assault. Normally, a Civil War frontal assault had to achieve tactical surprise in order to succeed.²²

The Three-to-One Rule of Thumb

A widely accepted theory of combat is based on the assumption that the attacker needs a three-to-one strength advantage to defeat the defender. In 1863 this was a

relatively new military concept. In fact, in a letter to MC Henry W. Halleck on 19 September 1863 President Lincoln argued "the thesis that the inherent battlefield superiority of defensive posture is such that a military planner or commander can count on defensive success if he has at least two-thirds the strength of the attacker."²³ Here Lincoln is expressing the corollary of the three-to-one rule, but more importantly, it shows that by September 1863 he had become "familiar with the fundamentals of strategy and with the basic principles of war."²⁴

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CHAPTER II

EASTERN VIRGINIA THEATER SITUATION

POST GETTYSBURG

Following his defeat at Gettysburg Lee stole a march on Meade and slipped back across the Potomac River at Williamsport into Virginia on 14 July 1863. Meade received harsh criticism for this escape, even though he made a sound decision not to attack the strong entrenchments the Army of Northern Virginia had constructed at Falling Waters while waiting for the flooded Potomac to subside.¹ Meade resumed the pursuit and tried to strike Lee's flank by moving through Manassas Gap (see Appendix 1). He lost any chance for success, however, because of the delay of his Third Army Corps, commanded by MG William H. French. Lee retired to Culpeper and Meade advanced to a line along the Rappahannock River with his headquarters at Warrenton.²

On 1 August Meade made a demonstration against the enemies flank causing Lee to move his army south of the Rapidan River.³ Shortly thereafter Meade was forced to send twenty regiments, between 8,000 to 10,000 men, to New York City to quell the Draft Riots.⁴ This event caused a suspension of his efforts to bring on a decisive engagement with the Confederate Army. Lee did not anticipate any immediate move by Meade so he transferred

Lieutenant General (LTC) James Longstreet's Corps to Tennessee to reinforce GEN Braxton Bragg on 9-10 September.5 Two weeks later Meade's strength was further reduced by the ensuing transfer of the Eleventh and Twelfth Corps to the Western Theater after the Union defeat at Chickamauga.6

THE BRISTOE CAMPAIGN

On 11 October Lee tried to take advantage of Meade's depleted strength by moving around his right flank and seizing the Orange and Alexandria Railroad in the rear of the Union Army. Over the next few days Meade withdrew the Army of the Potomac to positions in the vicinity of Centreville to cover Washington and protect his line of communications, the Orange and Alexandria Railroad.7 By withdrawing in the face of inferior numbers Meade temporarily lost the initiative in his attempt to engage Lee in decisive combat. Lee was still racing to cut the railroad and ordered two columns to Bristoe Station. This order brought on the 14 October engagement of Bristoe Station, when LTG General Ambrose P. Hill's Corps collided with MG Gouverneur K. Warren's Second Army Corps. MG Henry Heth's Division of Hill's Corps sustained 1,378 casualties by impetuously attacking Warren's Corps which was posted behind a natural defensive position-a railroad embankment. Warren's Corps sustained only 546 losses.8 After this disaster, Lee decided to withdraw back across the Rappahannock River, but not before destroying 25 miles

of the railroad from Broad Run to the river.⁹ So ended the Bristoe Campaign.

Meade's conduct in the Bristoe Campaign can be viewed from two perspectives. If one considers Meade's withdrawal as merely a technique to counter Lee's thrust for the Orange and Alexandria Railroad, then he was perfectly successful. However, looking at Meade's offensive responsibilities as army commander makes his retrograde movement to Centreville become questionable.¹⁰ Some years after the war, Meade's loyal Chief of Staff, MG Andrew A. Humphreys disclosed that, "After the war, Lee acknowledged to Meade that his scheme had been frustrated in this operation; that he had been completely outmaneuvered."¹¹

PHASES OF THE MINE RUN CAMPAIGN

This study examines the campaign in three phases. Phase I (20 October-10 November 1863) covers the advance of the Army of the Potomac to the line of the Rappahannock River. Phase II (11-20 November 1863) examines the Army of the Potomac's maneuvers between the Rappahannock and Rapidan Rivers. Phase III (21 November-2 December 1863) investigates the attempt to envelope Lee's army south of the Rapidan River.

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CHAPTER III

A PROFILE OF MG GEORGE GORDON MEADE

Born in Cadiz, Spain on 31 December 1815 Meade was 47 years old at the time of the Mine Run Campaign. His father was an American exporter and merchant trading in Spain.¹ Meade graduated from West Point as a brevet Second Lieutenant (2LT) of Artillery on 1 July 1835, finishing 19 in a class of 56, but he resigned his commission the following year.² He reentered the Army on 19 May 1842 as a 2LT in the Corps of Topographical Engineers, saw service in the Mexican War, and performed Army engineer duties until the start of the Civil War.³ As a Brigadier General (BG) of volunteers with practically no experience as a troop leader, he advanced steadily from command of a brigade during the Peninsular campaign, where he was wounded at White Oak Swamp, and the 2nd Bull Run Campaign, then to the command of a division at Antietam and Fredericksburg, and command of the Fifth Army Corps at Chancellorsville.⁴ Because of his solid reputation as troop leader many of the generals of the Army of the Potomac recommended him to President Lincoln for command of the army after the debacle at Chancellorsville.⁵

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Meade was not a glamorous figure and has been described as a six foot tall thin man who always appeared "gaunt, grizzled, and stern."⁶ A critic, Charles Dana,

Assistant Secretary of War, described Meade as "dyspeptic" -meaning he looked morbidly gloomy and pessimistic.⁷ Another observer of Meade, seeing him mounted on horseback with a campaign slouch hat pulled down over his protruding Roman nose, was reminded "of a grim helmed knight."⁸ The field photograph of Meade shown in Appendix 2 confirms these impressions.

PERSONALITY

Generally, Meade remained aloof, uncongenial, and "made no effort to make himself popular."⁹ On occasion he was verbally abrasive to his staff and those around him. Dana says that Meade "was totally lacking in cordiality toward those with whom he had business, and in consequence was generally disliked by his subordinates."¹⁰ When absorbed in thought, Meade often spouted like a "firecracker, always going bang at somebody near him."¹¹ Since he usually wore spectacles he was dubbed as the "goggle eyed old snapping turtle."¹² In spite of his despotic image Meade did have a wry sense of humor. At Gettysburg, while under fire, he related the following Mexican War anecdote:

That now reminds me of a feller at the Battle of Buena Vista, who, having got behind a wagon, during a severe cannonade, was there found by General Taylor. 'Wall Gin'ral,' said he, looking rather sheepish, 'this ain't much protection, but it kinder feels as it was'.¹³

INTELLECT AND SOLDIER SKILLS

There are negative and positive views of Meade's intellect and skills as a soldier. A negative view is found in the book Lincoln and His Generals:

As a general, Meade was competent in a routine sort of way. He handled troops well, he was above the average as a tactician, and he had a fair amount of courage in a crisis. He did not have enough boldness or originality to be a good strategist. His strategic plans showed no brilliance, not even much imagination.¹⁴

A partisan view is found in the letters of Theodore Lyman. Lyman claims that Meade himself declared that he was not Napoleon, but goes on to say that Meade:

is a thorough soldier, and a mighty clear-headed man; and one who does not move unless he knows where and how many his men are; where and how many his enemy's men are; and what sort of country he has to go through. I never saw a man in my life who was so characterized by straightforward truthfulness as he is. He will pitch into himself in a moment, if he thinks he has done wrong; and woe to those, no matter who they are, who do not do right.¹⁵

POLITICAL AWARENESS AND THE MEDIA

Meade understood the political process of the time. However, by his own words he had no political influence with the Washington government and he had no ambitions to become involved in the intrigues of the political generals.¹⁶ He had problems with newspaper correspondents because he simply refused to speak to them. It is no

surprise that his reputation was not enhanced by the press.¹⁷ Meade employed his Provost Marshall, BC Marsena Patrick, in trying to control the swarms of correspondents accompanying the army.¹⁸

COURAGE

Meade's personal bravery and courage under fire cannot be questioned. He was severely wounded during the Peninsular Campaign and at Antietam he was struck by a spent grape-shot and two horses he rode were shot.¹⁹ Just before the Mine Run Campaign Lyman relates how Meade's saddle flap had a bullet hole within one inch of his leg.²⁰

AGGRESSIVENESS

One view of Meade is that he fought a completely defensive the battle at Gettysburg. He did it with considerable tactical skill by placing his corps well and applying reserves at decisive places and times; however, he showed no aggressive spirit.²¹ This criticism would haunt Meade throughout the war. The author of the recent book Embattled Courage-The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War, Gerald F. Linderman, speculates that Meade was one of the "conservator generals" of the conflict.²² The conservator generals were brave men by the standards of their time and optimistically entered the war feeling that combat was a test of courage and military proficiency. They were generally mindful of the welfare of their men and as the war progressed they rejected the

emerging terror tactics of massed infantry assaults against prepared positions. On the other hand LTG Ulysses S. Grant and MG William T. Sherman were "destroyer generals" because they were eventually able to sublimate their concern for the tremendous losses sustained at places like Cold Harbor and Atlanta.²³ More simply stated, "perhaps Meade was too gentle a person to be a successful general in total war."²⁴ These theories may explain the perception that Meade lacked aggressive spirit.

MEADE'S STATE OF MIND

What was Meade's state of mind going into the Mine Run Campaign? Perhaps the best answer to this question is the observations of a British Officer of Engineers who visited the Army of the Potomac in late autumn of 1863:

He [Meade] looked, when we met him, a good deal worn. He talked of his present position as a very difficult one-a fine army commanded by a first rate general in his front, and an uncertain, interfering, yet timorous government in constant communication with him in rear, while his own army is chiefly composed of undrilled, undisciplined conscripts.²⁵

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CHAPTER IV

MEADE'S OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Like any modern commander, Meade had a plethora of factors to consider. The commander's considerations outlined in today's Field Manual 100-5, Operations, can serve as analytical tools to understand Meade's operational challenges. These factors, known as "METT-T," include the following: mission, enemy, terrain (and weather), troops, and time available.¹

MISSION

As a theater commander Meade was influenced by three factors of operational design in determining his mission concept and intent. These factors are centers of gravity, lines of operation, and the interpretation of the strategic/operational instructions he received from President Abraham Lincoln and Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton, through the General-in-Chief, Halleck. The resultant of these factors is a statement of Meade's intent.

Centers of Gravity

The concept that centers of gravity are fundamental to the operational design of a campaign evolved from von Clausewitz's conclusion that, "of all the possible aims in war, the destruction of the enemy's forces always appears as the highest."² In late 1863 Meade had to choose among three potential Confederate centers of gravity in the

Eastern Virginia Theater. First, and foremost, there was the Army of Northern Virginia. Other possible centers of gravity were the Confederate capitol at Richmond and the predominate personage of Robert E. Lee, commander of the Army of Northern Virginia.

Some authorities criticize Meade for not making the Army of Northern Virginia his primary objective.³ This criticism has little base in fact because Meade's central focus was to engage and destroy his primary center of gravity-the Army of Northern Virginia. Writing to his wife on 17 October 1863, following the action at Bristoe Station, Meade said, "If he (Lee) is near me I shall attack him, but I fear that, failing in his maneuver, he is either going back, or going up into the Shenandoah, where I shall have to follow him."⁴ Perhaps the worst that can be said about Meade's approach to this center of gravity is that he was overly cautious. This assertion is evident in a 30 October letter to his wife where Meade writes,

It was greatly to my interest to fight, and I was most anxious to do so, but I would not do so with all the advantages on his (Lee's) side, and the certainty that if the battle went against me I could not extricate the army from its perilous position. I don't suppose I shall ever get credit for my motives, except with the army.⁵

In a speech given after the war, Humphreys evaluated the importance of the Confederate capital as follows:

Lee uncovered Richmond by his movement-why did not Meade move on that, and swap queens? The answer to it is very obvious. The two queens were not of equal value. Richmond was a small town, and any other much smaller town would have furnished equally well all the conveniences required for the personnel of the Confederate government. There were no Southern towns of any consequence within several hundred miles of it. Washington was four times larger than Richmond, was the capital of the Country, and had collected in it all our national archives. Near to it was the rich and populous city of Baltimore, and not far off the still richer and more populous city of Philadelphia.⁶

Did Meade share this view? Probably so, because like any army commander he carefully considered the counsel of his chief of staff. In any event, this quote offers a possible explanation of Lincoln's paranoia of always keeping the Army of the Potomac between Washington and the Confederate Army.

Since Lee was such a dominating personality and leader it is plausible to consider him as a potential enemy center of gravity. The literature suggests that Meade felt frustrated with Lee. Writing to his wife on 21 October Meade laments,

Lee has retired across the Rappahannock, after completely destroying the railroad on which I depend for my supplies. His object is to prevent my advance, and in the meantime send more troops to Bragg. This was a deep game, and I am free to admit that in the playing of it he has got the advantage of me.⁷

Provost Marshall Patrick, writing at about the same time, said, "Meade's head is tolerably clear, generally, but

when he gets 'Lee on the Brain' he errs thro' timidity, based on obstinacy...."8

Lines of Operation

Upon assuming command of the army in late June Meade had been ordered by Halleck to "maneuver and fight in such a manner as to cover the capital."9 This prime directive still applied in October 1863 and forcing Meade to cover Washington in any scheme of maneuver he considered. Therefore, during the Mine Run Campaign Meade operated from a single line of operation extending from Washington to his army in the field. The specific line of communication (LOC) that supported his operations was the Orange and Alexandria Railroad. As the campaign unfolded Meade became dissatisfied with the Orange and Alexandria line because it complicated any movement of his army around Lee's left. Specifically, Meade thought his Orange and Alexandria LOC would be threatened or cut if he attempted a flanking movement around the left of the Army of Northern Virginia.10

Operational Guidance from Above

After two years of war Lincoln's administration still lacked a single national military strategy that coordinated the efforts of all Federal armies in the field. Between June and November 1863 Meade received substantial guidance from Washington, but its orientations was operational rather than strategic. The aim of the guidance was to coax Meade into attacking and destroying

the Army of Northern Virginia. His challenge was to apply this operational guidance in the design and organization of his campaign. The following paragraphs chronicle the salient pieces of guidance provided to Meade.

On 27 June he was directed to cover Washington with his army. This became an operational imperative for Meade in all subsequent instructions and has to be considered his most vital consideration. On 15 September Meade received two additional pieces of seemingly conflicting guidance. At 1100 hours Halleck wired Meade to "to at least threaten Lee, and if possible, cut off a slice of his army."¹¹ Halleck qualified this guidance, however, by stating, "I do not think the exact condition of affairs is sufficiently ascertained to authorize an very considerable advance."¹² Later the same day he sent a letter to Meade with similar guidance, attached with a note from President Lincoln. In it Lincoln expressed the opinion that "he should move upon Lee at once in manner of general attack, leaving to developments whether he will make it a real attack."¹³ Meade's reaction was to move the army across the Rappahannock River and to begin sparring with Lee, the resultant being the Bristoe Campaign.

On 15 October, the day after the battle of Bristoe Station, Halleck wired Meade to inquire if Lee "is...not trying to bully you, while the mass of the rebel armies are concentrating against Rosecrans?...Instead of

retreating, I think you ought to give him battle."¹⁴ At 1030 hours, 21 October Meade telegraphed his response:

It seems to me, therefore, that the campaign is virtually over for the present season, and that it would be better to withdraw the army to some position in front of Washington and detach from it such portions as may be required to operate elsewhere.¹⁵

In effect Meade was asking to put the army into winter quarters. By 2115 hours, 21 October he received the following tart reply: "If you can conveniently leave your army, the President wishes to see you to-morrow."¹⁶ So much for the idea of winter quarters. Meade reported the results of his 22 October meeting with the President in a letter to his wife:

The President was, as he always is, very considerate and kind. He found no fault with my operation, although it was very evident he was disappointed that I had not got a battle out of Lee. He coincided with me that there was not much to be gained by any further advance; but General Halleck was very urgent that something should be done, but what that something was he did not define. As the Secretary of War was absent in Tennessee, final action was postponed till his return.¹⁷

This quote points out the complexities of the decision making process in the National Command Authority of 1863.

Meade returned to the army without specific guidance, but he did not have to wait long. On 24 October Halleck telegraphed Meade that "the President desires that you prepare to attack Lee's army."¹⁸ Here Meade received the definitive guidance that committed him to launch the Mine

Run Campaign.

One final episode between Meade and Washington was to have a significant impact on the course of the campaign. Meade thought that the Orange and Alexandria LOC hampered his ability to maneuver the army. Therefore, on 2 November he requested authority to change his base of operations by advancing to the heights of Fredericksburg and opening a new supply line with the railroad connected to Aquia Landing. This LOC would better support his attempt to envelope the right flank of Lee's army in the upcoming operation.¹⁹ Halleck's response was immediate and imperative: "Any tactical movement to turn a flank or threaten a communication is left to your own judgment; but an entire change of base ...I can neither advise nor approve."²⁰ Rejection of Meade's proposal can be viewed as a subtle evaluation of their concerns about Meade's offensive spirit, a logical view considering his retreat before Lee's numerically inferior army during the Bristoe Campaign.

This disapproval seriously limited Meade's operational concept during the rest of the campaign. Humphreys claimed that if the army had been permitted to occupy the Fredericksburg line, "the first battle with Lee, in May, 1864, would not have been fought in the Wilderness, but in a more open country."²¹ Indeed, Grant would use this LOC throughout the campaigns of 1864 and 1865.

Meade's Intent

What was Meade's operational intent as he entered the Mine Run Campaign? Lyman, the Volunteer ADC, reports that Meade had three imperatives on his mind. His primary aim was to catch Lee in a good corner and fight a decisive battle. A secondary concern was to prevent Lee from catching the Army of the Potomac in a bad corner. Finally, Meade had to cover Washington and Maryland, which for the Army of the Potomac was more important than for Lee to cover Richmond.²²

ENEMY

Strength

Returns for the Army of Northern Virginia as of 20 November show Present For Duty (PFD) strength as 3,736 officers and 44,850 enlisted soldiers. Aggregate present was listed as 56,088 and aggregate present & absent was listed as 96,576.²³ Obviously, the Confederate Army had a significant Absent Without Leave (AWOL) and desertion problem. Longstreet's Corps had been transferred to Bragg's Army in the Western Theater in September, 1863.

Organization

The Order of Battle of the Army of Northern Virginia as of 31 October 1863 is shown in Appendix 3.

Limiting Factors

Two key factors influenced the Confederate army during the campaign. First, Lee had great difficulty supplying

his soldiers with adequate rations due to chronic shortages of food stuffs in the Confederacy and a non-functional distribution system. The Confederate Commissary General, Lucius B. Northrop, estimated that during the winter of 1863-1864 that his department could supply 4,000 head of cattle to the army. The previous winter he had been able to process 40,000 head of cattle.²⁴ Second, Lee experienced significant health problems during the campaign. In late September he began to suffer the extreme pain associated with the cardiac condition of angina pectoris. The pain was so severe that at times he could not ride his horse and on 16 October he could not lead the army. His inability to ride continued through the early days of November.²⁵

TERRAIN (AND WEATHER)

North of the Rappahannock and Rapidan Rivers is the Piedmont of Central Virginia. According to a contemporary description this area was generally:

wooded and watered; it abounds in practicable roads; a railroad (the Orange and Alexandria) intersects it from end to end; while from its gently undulating surface occasional hills or knobs, rising from hundreds of feet about the general level enable considerable areas of the surrounding country to be observed, and afford rare opportunities for the operations of the Signal Service....²⁶

South of the Rapidan River the topography is "more or less rolling, and wooded with dense groves of pines and hardwoods, mostly oak."²⁷ Both of the rivers in the area were major terrain obstacles during winter high water

levels and required bridging materials for troops to cross them. At places the steep south bank of the Rappahannock towered over the river by more than 100 feet, thereby enabling the Confederate works to command the river crossings.²⁸ Mine Run itself is a small tributary creek of the Rappahannock River. To the east of Mine Run Creek was the densely forested tract known as the Wilderness.

A limited road network was available throughout this area. The few roads available were north-south or east-west in orientation. The trafficability of these roads was adversely affected by wet weather because their physical composition was a mixture of clay or sand. One heavy rain was all that was needed to make these kinds of roads virtually impassable. In an attempt to compensate for the affect of the weather some roads were corduroyed or planked to permit movement.²⁹

The literature concerning this campaign suggests that weather was only marginal for the operations of a Civil War era army. Movement was often hampered in the early stages of the campaign by heavy rains which made fording rivers and streams difficult. In the later stages of the campaign bitter and intense cold slowed the movement of the army and resulted in numerous cold weather injuries including death.

TROOPS

Strength

Returns for the Army of the Potomac as of 20 November

show PFD strength as 4,660 officers and 79,614 enlisted soldiers with an aggregate strength of 95,857.30

Organization

The Order of Battle of the Army of the Potomac as of 20 November is shown in Appendix 4. As previously noted Meade lost two corps to the Western Theater at the end of September. This reduced his span of control over corps headquarters by two from the Gettysburg Campaign.

Limiting Factors

Meade did not face the subsistence problem that Lee did. As long as he kept his LOC with Washington open, Meade could expect to be provisioned with a reasonable quantity of rations and ammunition.

Meade's army also suffered from desertion. During 1863 the Union army averaged 4,647 desertions monthly.³¹ Reported desertions from Union armies during the period of the Mine Run Campaign were as follows: October-4,391, November-3,376, and December-3,427.³² Bad weather contributed to the desertion problem because exposure to bitter cold, drenching rains, and the grinding fatigue of constant marching strained soldier morale.³³ Laboring under a combat load of 45 pounds (including rifle, bayonet, 60 rounds of ammunition, and 3 to 8 days rations), the Federal infantryman could be quickly frustrated by the loathsome Virginia mud.³⁴ A private from Rhode Island describes the experience:

This foot sank very insidiously into the

mud, and reluctantly came out again, it had to be coaxed. and while you were persuading your reluctant left, the willing right was sinking into unknown depths: it came out of the mud like the noise of a suction pump when the water is exhausted.35

Meade's army was beginning to feel the effects of the draft. Testifying before Congress in March 1864, Meade stated:

I had received some accessions to my army from the draft. But of the conscripts who came in, considerable numbers deserted soon after arriving. The most of these were raw and unreliable, and could not be considered by me as being practically of much value until they had been some time in the army.36

Army Leadership

United States Military Academy (USMA) graduates dominated key command and staff positions in the Army of the Potomac. All the corps commanders were USMA graduates and ranged from 33 (Warren) to 50 (MG John Sedgwick) years of age. Humphreys, the Chief of Staff, 53, had graduated from USMA in 1831 (four years before Meade). BG Rufus Ingalls, the Chief, Quartermaster, and BG Seth Williams, the Adjutant General, were also USMA graduates.37 The course of instruction at West Point had not prepared them to lead large formations at the operational level of war; therefore, they were learning by trial and error.

Meade was missing three corps commanders. MG John Reynolds, an outstanding combat commander, was gone forever, killed-in-action at Gettysburg. MG Winfield Hancock, dubbed "the superb", was convalescing from a

severe wound received during Picket's Charge. MG Dan Sickles, the recalcitrant corps commander, was also convalescing from a Gettysburg wound. Sickles showed up at army headquarters in mid-October to resume command of the Third Army Corps, but in his words, "General Meade expressed his disinclination, on account of his doubts as to my physical ability to meet the exigencies of the position of a corps commander."³⁸ Considering the aggravation Sickles caused Meade over the conduct of the battle of Gettysburg, it is doubtful that Meade cared if Sickles ever convalesced enough to resume field duty.³⁹

TIME AVAILABLE

When the Administration rebuffed Meade's proposal to go into winter quarters on 24 October, he effectively began a race with nature to initiate an offensive before the onset of winter weather. Meade had no time to lose. Wet and cold weather would retard the army's movement and make its bivouacs a certain source of sickness among the troops. An especially dangerous aspect of wet weather operations was the potential adverse effect on the firepower of the Infantry and Artillery due to moist cartridges and charges.⁴⁰

ENDNOTES

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31. Ella Lonn, Desertion During the Civil War, pp. 151-152.

32. Ibid., p. 233.

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35. Lonn, p. 131.

36. Joint Conduct, p. 340.

37. Boatner, pp. 417, 425, 730, 891, and 928.

38. Joint Conduct, p. 303.

39. Cleaves, p. 216-217.

40. Griffith, p. 120.

CHAPTER V

PHASE I-ADVANCE TO THE LINE OF THE RAPPAHANNOCK (20 October 1863-10 November 1863)

SITUATION

Following the Confederate disaster at Bristoe Station Lee withdrew his army to positions on the south bank of the Rappahannock. On 20 October his two corps were arrayed along a line parallel to the river with elements of LTG Richard S. Ewell's Corps covering two key river crossing sites. The first, Rappahannock Station, was where the Orange and Alexandria Railroad crossed the river and the second, Kelly's Ford, was about four miles downstream. The terrain north of the river at both crossing sites dominated the southern bank. Since Lee feared a Federal surprise attack on his right flank while occupying the Rappahannock line, he defended Rappahannock Station with a *tete-de-point* (strong point) on the north bank. He probably reasoned that this strong point would delay the Federal Army long enough for him to concentrate reinforcements to hold the bridgehead. Also, as long as he held Kelly's Ford any crossing further down the Rappahannock by Meade's army would be risky at best.¹ By 2 November the Army of Northern Virginia was positioned between the Rappahannock River and Culpeper in a position to resist any advance by Meade via Kelly's Ford,

Rappahannock Station or Sulphur Springs.2

Meade cautiously followed Lee by moving towards Warrenton and taking up a position to cover the Warrenton Pike and the Orange and Alexandria Railroad. His cavalry was used to observe the fords of the Rappahannock. As he advanced Meade found that 20 miles of the Orange and Alexandria Railroad had been destroyed from Bristoe Station to the Rappahannock.3 On 20 October Meade's army occupied Warrenton without opposition.4 On 24 October Meade received guidance from Washington directing him to prepare to attack Lee.

INTELLIGENCE CONSIDERATIONS

Meade's Bureau of Military Information found that "it was a difficult matter to estimate, from the numerous reports and accounts received daily, just what Lee was trying to do."5 Most of the reports reaching Meade during this period indicated that Lee's army was building winter quarter huts in the area between the Rappahannock and the Rapidan.6 Furthermore, Meade's estimate of enemy strength was not unduly inflated. Lee, he reasoned, "had about 60,000 men; I thought I was probably from 8,000 to 10,000 his superior."7 Weather conditions for operations during this period were favorable as Patrick reports that "it is now the Indian Summer and the weather is perfectly beautiful."8

Throughout the campaign Meade's preparation of the

battlefield suffered from the lack of adequate reconnaissance. Pleasonton's cavalry was prevented from performing this vital task for a variety of reasons. Although the cavalry under BG John Buford had played a decisive role at Gettysburg in fixing the position of the Confederate Army, that role was not repeated during the Mine Run Campaign. Instead, the cavalry was employed in the largely stationary roles of picket duty, guarding supply trains, screening flanks, and observing river fords. Their performance during the campaign was further slowed by the outbreak of hoof and mouth disease in the cavalry herd.⁹ Later in the campaign cavalry mounts would suffer from a lack of hay and only half rations of oats.¹⁰

MEADE'S OPTIONS

By 2 November the Superintendent of Military Railroads, Colonel David C. McCallum, had restored the Orange and Alexandria Rail line from Bristoe Station to Warrenton Junction so that supplies could flow to Meade's army.¹¹ Meade developed a course of action to change his base by seizing the heights of Fredericksburg and forcing Lee to abandon his line along the Rappahannock. If Lee attacked him he could then fight a defensive battle in a strong position vis-a-vis Gettysburg. Here Meade was clearly planning at the operational level. Unfortunately, General-in-Chief Halleck did not share this view, which left Meade one option. He had to force the Rappahannock

to get at Lee's army and reoccupy the terrain lost during the Bristoe Campaign.

MEADE'S PLAN

Scheme of Maneuver

An Army Circular dated 6 November outlined Meade's plan for action on 7 November. To facilitate command & control and reduce his span of control, Meade divided the army between his two senior corps commanders. Sedgwick commanded the "right column" consisting of his own Sixth Corps and MG George Sykes' Fifth Corps. French commanded the "left column" consisting of his own Third Army Corps, MG John Newton's First Army Corps, and Warren's Second Army Corps. Buford's Cavalry Division would screen the right flank and BG H. Judson Kilpatrick's Division would screen the left flank. Pioneers troops would accompany the advancing columns. Meade also issued separate detailed guidance to the column commanders. Sedgwick's column was to move from the vicinity of Warrenton, cross the river by driving Confederate forces from their positions at Rappahannock Station, and then advance to Brandy Station. French's column was to move from the vicinity of Warrenton Junction, cross the river by driving Confederate forces from their positions at Kelly's Ford, turn north to assist the left column at Rappahannock Station, then together with the left column advance towards Brandy Station.¹²

The written plans noted above are remarkable for their clarity and completeness. Meade's overall operational concept was simple and direct. In turn, his detailed instructions to the column commanders provided them comprehensive tactical guidance to include contingency orders. It is hard to imagine an army of 90,000+ soldiers being able to move and fight based on only four pages of written instructions. Modern commanders should be so lucky.

Operational Sustainment

Meade understood the criticality of operational sustainment. He was also sensitive to the issue of army transport, particularly so, after he received this guidance from General-in-Chief Halleck on 7 August 1863:

We must reduce our transportation or give up all idea of competing with the enemy in the field. Napoleon very correctly estimated the effective strength of an army by its numbers multiplied by its mobility; that is, 10,000 men who could march 20 miles per day as equal to 20,000 men who could march only 10 miles per day. Unless we can reduce our impedimenta very considerably, we can equal the enemy only by a vast superiority in numbers.¹³

Here "Old Brains" Halleck is imparting to Meade the military wisdom he gained from his personal translation of Jomini's *Vie de Napoleon*.¹⁴ Along with Halleck's guidance came a War Department General Order [G.O. 274] which stipulated the maximum amount of transportation permitted in field operations. For example, the headquarters of an army corps was only authorized 2 wagons or 8 pack animals

and every 80 non-commissioned officers [NCO]/privates were authorized 1 wagon or 5 pack animals.¹⁵ Obedient Meade quickly adopted the War Department standards by issuing Army of the Potomac GO 83, dated 21 August 1863.

Interestingly enough the same guidance was issued to the army by GO 100, dated 5 November 1863, the day before the attack order of 6 November 1863.¹⁶ Meade wanted the army to move quickly and unencumbered by *impedimenta*!

In the operation order Meade specified that corps would carry 40 rounds of ammunition for the infantry. In a precautionary move he planned for the combat field trains to remain north of the river until he directed them to cross.¹⁷

EXECUTION

In spite of the fact that Lee had shifted his army to meet the Federal threat at the fords, Meade's movement on 7 November to force the Rappahannock proved to be one of the most stunning Union tactical victories of the war. Both columns of the army accomplished their strong attack plans in accordance with Meade's overall concept (see Appendix 5).

By 1200 hours, 7 November elements of French's Third Army Corps advanced in overwhelming strength to Kelly's Ford, drove elements of Rode's Division, Ewell's Corps, across the river, and secured a lodgement on the south side.¹⁸ In the process French's forces captured two infantry regiments from North Carolina, the 2nd and the

Meanwhile, Sedgwick's column was experiencing similar terrors. About 1200 hours Sedgwick moved into position astride the railroad and opposite Early's tete-de-point on the north side of the river. Through the afternoon he pounded the Confederate positions with well placed artillery fire and at about 1700 hours (dusk) ordered a frontal assault. In a rare night bayonet attack led by COL Emory Upton's and COL Peter C. Ellmaker's Brigades (First Division, Sixth Corps) the first line of Confederate rifle pits were taken without firing a shot. The Confederates, not expecting this surprise attack, assumed their bridgehead was secure for the night. However, after furious fighting resistance crumbled with large numbers of Confederates captured and few escaping across the pontoon bridge to the south side of the river. When Early learned of the disaster he order the bridge burned.²⁰ "At a cost of 69 killed and 257 wounded the Federals, without firing a shot, captured the position in an attack nearly unparalleled in the army's experience."²¹ Total Confederate losses numbered 1,600 men, six battle flags, 1,225 small arms, and four artillery pieces.²² It was a disaster for Lee's army on the order of Bristoe Station three weeks earlier. Sedgwick's savage assault shattered Lee's gamble with the tete-de-pont. More importantly, Lee had been deceived by Meade's strength and operational ability to move and concentrate the Army of

the Potomac at the decisive place and time.

MEADE'S REACTION

Unfortunately Meade did not press the advantage that the actions of 7 November gave him. Since Sedgwick was unable to gather information about the enemy intentions across the river due to a heavy fog, Meade assumed the worst case that Lee might attack French at the Kelly's Ford bridgehead.²³ He may have been deceived by reports of prisoners taken at Rappahannock Station that part of Longstreet's Corps had returned to Lee.²⁴ Accordingly, at 2330 hours, 7 November he instructed Sedgwick to reinforce French and to throw a pontoon bridge across the river at dawn. Meanwhile, Meade instructed French to advance his column along the southern shore of the Rappahannock at dawn towards Rappahannock Station to drive Confederate forces from Sedgwick's front and to assist the Sixth Corps in crossing the river.²⁵

Lee's reacted on 8 November by withdrawing his army to a new position southwest of Brandy Station. He had reached a culminating point on 7 November because that "was the last day his army as a whole would ever have the offensive capability to reach, let alone cross, the upper Rappahannock River."²⁶

By the time the Third and Sixth Corps started the pursuit towards Brandy Station late on the afternoon of 8 November, Lee was safely in his new position. Meade

crossed over the river at 1400 hours, 8 November and linked up with the Third and Sixth Corps near Brandy Station. Although there were at least six cavalry skirmishes during 8 November, the delays in crossing the Rappahannock coupled with the sluggishness of the pursuit prevented Meade from capitalizing on the tactical successes at Kelly's Ford and Rappahannock.²⁷

Lee, fearing he could be flanked by Meade while he remained north of the Rapidan River, used the night of 8 November to withdraw south of the river. By 10 November he occupied a line anchored on the left at Liberty Mills, a crossing point of the Rapidan five and one-half miles southwest of Orange Court House. Ewell's Corps, under the temporary command of MG Jubal A. Early, held the right half of this line and Hill's Corps held the left of the line. The cavalry screened both flanks and guarded the lower fords of the Rapidan.²⁸

Meade glowed in the accomplishments of 7 November and wrote to his wife:

The operation being successful, the army is in fine spirits, and of course I am more popular than ever, having been greeted yesterday as I rode through the ranks with great cheering; and my having forced the passage of the Rappahannock and compelled Lee to retire to the Rapidan, will I trust convince the intelligent public that my retreat to Centreville was not to avoid battle, and that Lee, who was not outflanked, or had his communications threatened, but was attacked in front, and yet withdrawn, is really the one who has avoided battle.²⁹

While Meade may have felt vindicated by this operation, he may have also considered that he had accomplished enough for the current campaigning season. In any event, at 2000 hours on 8 November he wired Halleck that "it will be necessary before I make any farther advance to repair the railroad to the Rappahannock, which the engineers say will take five days."³⁰ Flushed with success and unwilling to risk his line of communications, Meade suspended the pursuit. In so doing Meade missed his second opportunity to force Lee into a decisive engagement.

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CHAPTER VI

PHASE II-PAUSE IN THE IRON TRIANGLE

(11 November 1863-20 November 1863)

"THE IRON TRIANGLE"

When Meade suspended the pursuit of Lee, the campaign entered into a short lull in active operations. Once again the Army of the Potomac found itself stalled in the area Patrick described as the "Iron Triangle." This piece of terrain consisted of the area between the Rappahannock and Rapidan Rivers and centering on the town of Culpeper Court House (see Appendix 6).¹ For Meade this terrain favored offensive operations because it was described as "abounding in military positions and in every way favorable for the development and maneuver of large bodies of troops."² Conversely, Lee probably viewed the "Iron Triangle" as poor defensive terrain because it afforded Meade the chance to maneuver around either of his flanks. This explains, in part, Lee's haste in falling back to a line south of the Rapidan on 10 November.

During this period Meade busied himself with repairing the Orange and Alexandria Railroad, replenishing the army and planning his next operation. Meade faced a quandary. Should he put the army into winter quarters or continue the offensive? Second guessing their commander, Federal soldiers sought creature comfort and began constructing

winter quarter huts on sites they had occupied just a month earlier.³ Secretary Stanton "helped" Meade to make his decision. When Meade, to impress the Administration with his victory at Rappahannock Station, arranged for the presentation of captured battle flags by a guard of honor to Secretary Stanton on 11 November, Stanton completely snubbed the ceremony. He was angered by Meade's suspension of the pursuit. A politically astute Meade recognized the significance of the snub and requested a consultation with Stanton and Halleck on 15 November.⁴

CONSULTATION IN WASHINGTON

There is no record of what went on during Meade's meeting in Washington. Perhaps Meade went to Washington seeking permission to place the army into winter quarters. After all, in his own mind, he had achieved a great victory by forcing the Rappahannock and had thwarted Lee's attempt to flank him during the Bristoe Campaign. In addition, he probably sensed the exhaustion of the army in view of its continuous hard campaigning since the Gettysburg Campaign. Meade himself was probably drained because he could not find the time or energy to write to his wife during this period.⁵ In fact, when he returned from Washington on 16 November he kept his own counsel and would not indicate to his staff the results of the meeting.⁶ In view of subsequent events, however, Meade was probably directed to promptly resume offensive operations.

OPERATIONAL INTELLIGENCE

While in Washington Meade exchanged a series of frantic messages with his Chief of Staff generated by some false intelligence reports. Lee had apparently withdrawn from the Rapidan raising the fear of a flanking move by around Meade's left.⁷ However, by the evening of 15 November Humphreys confirmed that the Army of Northern Virginia was not moving.⁸ Meade could be reasonably sure that elements of Lee's Army were occupying strong entrenchments along the Rapidan with a general trace extending from the junction of the Rapidan and Rappahannock Rivers to Liberty Mills (west of Orange-Court House).⁹

Upon his return from Washington Meade's Bureau of Military Information provided him with two critical pieces of intelligence gathered from Confederate deserters, prisoners, and Union scouts. First, Lee was not guarding the lower fords of the Rapidan. Second, two roads (the Orange Turnpike and the Orange Plank Road) leading into the Confederate rear were clear and unobstructed.¹⁰ Furthermore, he was reasonably certain that Lee's two corps were dispersed over a distance of forty miles to facilitate their winter quarters bivouacs.¹¹ Meade now had sufficient information upon which to develop courses of action.

MEADE'S OPTIONS

By 16 November the Orange and Alexandria Railroad had been repaired to the Rappahannock and a bridge built over the river. Sidings for a depot at Brandy Station were constructed by 19 November and supplies for the army were stockpiled and delivered.¹² Meade now had a sustainment base to support offensive operations. Accordingly, by 20 November he was studying all the operational options available. He ruled out a direct frontal assault of Lee's Rapidan line in spite of his recent successes. The futile Federal charges at Fredericksburg in December 1862 and the disastrous Pickett's Charge probably lingered in his mind. He also ruled out an envelopment of Lee's left flank because such a move would endanger his own LOC. Besides Halleck had specifically restricted him to one LOC—the Orange and Alexandria Railroad. The option remaining was the envelopment of Lee's right flank. Based on his latest intelligence, this option offered Meade a magnificent opportunity to launch a surprise attack with a high probability of success.

ENDNOTES

1. Sparks, p. 280.
2. Davis, p. 475.
3. Graham and Skoch, p. 38.
4. Ibid., pp. 38-39.
5. Meade, p. 156.
6. Sparks, p. 307-308.
7. Graham and Skoch, p. 39.
8. OR, Volume 29, Part I, p. 466.
9. Ibid., p. 13.
10. Graham and Skoch, p. 40.
11. Joint Conduct, p. LXXIV
12. OR, Volume 29, Part I, p. 11.

CHAPTER VII

PHASE III-MINE RUN

(21 November 1863-2 December 1863)

TERRAIN AND WEATHER

The area south of the Rapidan River was wooded country. West of Fredericksburg was a densely wooded area known as the Wilderness. This nearly impenetrable area was unsuitable for military operations because the dense undergrowth and narrow roads made coordinated movement of large formations almost impossible.¹ In May 1863 Meade had commanded the Fifth Army Corps in this vicinity during the battle of Chancellorsville, and he was ostensibly aware of the difficulties the region could impose on the movement of his army. Ironically, the army would have to advance over the same approach roads it used before the embarrassing defeat at Chancellorsville.²

On 20 and 21 November the weather became a factor. A heavy rain storm adversely affected the trafficability of the road network in the area of operations. However, by 22 November Patrick reports that "the storm cleared up in the latter part of last night and this has been a glorious day for drying up the roads & hardening them."³

MEADE'S CONCEPT

Using what B.H. Liddell Hart would later characterize as "the indirect approach", Meade decided to envelope the

right flank of Lee's dispersed army by making an end run.⁴ To accomplish this he would cross his army at the lower fords of the Rapidan, quickly seize the Orange Turnpike and the Orange Plank Road, and then push his five corps along these roads, thereby, turning Lee's right flank. If successful he envisioned that he could force Lee to fight from unprepared positions.⁵ Meade also counted on the dispersion of Confederate forces to enable him to cripple or destroy Ewell's Corps in detail before Hill's Corps could reinforce Ewell. Finally, he hoped to secure "an effective lodgement at Orange Court House and Gordansville."⁶ The concept, designed to seize the initiative, shows that Meade was willing to risk the success of the operation on two key factors. The first factor involved his ability to achieve operational surprise. The second factor depended on the capacity of the corps commanders to rapidly advance their divisions during the movement to contact.

MEADE'S PLAN

Meade's operation order was printed in a circular to the corps commanders dated 23 November.⁷ To minimize confusion and errors, Meade personally briefed the corps commanders on the plan during the evening of 23 November. He even took the precaution of providing them with maps and sketches showing corps march routes.⁸

Scheme of Maneuver

The plan called for the army to cross the Rapidan in

three columns (see Appendix 7). French's Third Army Corps would cross the river at Jacob's Ford, proceed south to Robertson's Tavern, and there link-up with Warren's Second Army Corps. French's total march distance from Jacob's Ford to the Tavern was only 7 or 8 miles. Warren would reach Robertson's Tavern via the Plank Road and Orange Turnpike, having crossed the Rapidan at Germanna Ford. Sykes' Fifth Army Corps would cross the Rapidan at Culpeper Mine Ford, proceed south along the Plank Road, and turn west on the Orange Plank Road continuing to Parker's Store.⁹ Sedgwick's Sixth Army Corps would follow French and reinforce the right of the army. Newton's First Army Corps (minus 1 Division left to guard the railroad) would follow Sykes's to reinforce the left of the army. This disposition provided Meade with more than 50% of his infantry on the right and the ability to reinforce the center of the army with troops from either Sedgwick's or Newton's Corps. He did this because he felt most vulnerable to an attack on his right. BG David McM Gregg's Cavalry Division would screen the left flank of the army and BG George A. Custer's Division would screen the army right by guarding the upper fords of the Rapidan. Meanwhile, Buford's Division, BG Wesley Merritt commanding, would guard the field trains.¹⁰

Since the corps marching distances from bivouac to initial objectives ranged from 14 to 23 miles, Meade could reasonably assume that all approach marches could be

completed within thirty-four hours.¹¹ In this light, Meade's plan appears simple and logical. Unfortunately, from the synchronization viewpoint the plan was too complex for the corps commanders to execute, given the character of the local road network and the "friction" of war. Later Humphreys would write: "the plan promised brilliant success; to insure it required prompt, vigorous action, and intelligent compliance with the programme on the part of corps and other subordinate commanders."¹² Meade discarded the use of column commanders to synchronize the movement of the army, a technique that had worked well when the army forced the Rappahannock three weeks earlier. Meade chose instead to fix something that was not broken.

Operational Sustainment

Meade was a no nonsense "beans and bullets" general and cared little for extra comforts. This attitude prompted Provost Marshall Patrick to write, "there is a strong feeling rising up against Meade because he does nothing to keep up his Army or provide for its wants, outside of Ordinance, Subsistence, [and] Quarter Master's Stores."¹³ For the Mine Run operation he ordered troops to carry 8 days rations. Combat field trains were loaded with 10 days rations and forage. Meade also ordered that only one-half of the ammunition wagons and ambulances would accompany each corps in the combat trains. These combat trains would carry 30 rounds per man. The

remainder of the army combat field trains were placed under the control the Chief, Quartermaster, Ingalls, at Richardsville north of the Rappahannock. These trains were not to cross the river without Meade's express order-a technique he had used also in the Rappahannock operation. While the army remained south of the Rappahannock the army was supplied by bringing wagons and pack mules over the river at night.¹⁴

Preparation of the Battlefield

While Meade sought operational surprise, he did not enhance his chances by incorporating deception into his scheme of maneuver. There is no evidence to suggest that he planned any deception operations to precede or compliment the movement of the army. For instance, he might have planned a demonstration against the upper fords of the Rappahannock to hold Lee's attention, while he crossed at the lower fords. Instead, he relied solely on the rapid movement of the army to achieve surprise.

For the army to move rapidly it would have to know precisely where it was going. Accordingly, Meade issued reconnaissance instructions when he briefed the corps commanders on 23 November. However, with the exception of Warren, none of the corps and division commanders bothered personally to check their march routes or river crossing sites prior to the movement. Meade himself was guilty of this gross omission.¹⁵ Later, Humphreys rationalized the poor scouting of the approaches by stating, "the existence

and character of which had been ascertained, by careful inquiry, with sufficient accuracy to be used in such an operation, though not with the detail of an actual reconnaissance."¹⁶

EXECUTION

As the operation kicked off Meade remained optimistic of his chances of success. Unfortunately, Meade's optimism was not shared by the entire army. One of Sedgwick's staff officers may have expressed the prevailing attitude of the army when he related:

When we received the order to move, I do not believe there was a single officer at our headquarters but felt apprehensive in regard to the result. It seemed as though we were just going to butt our heads against a very thick stone wall.¹⁷

24-25 November

Meade had intended to begin the operation at first light on 24 November. However, a heavy rain storm on 24 November prevented any operations because the Rapidan became unfordable and all approach roads were turned into muddy quagmires.¹⁸ Since it would take two days for conditions to improve Meade reset the start time to 0600 hours, 26 November.¹⁹

In spite of the weather induced lull, two significant events took place on 25 November. The first event was positive for the Union cause. Meade learned from the War Department of Grant's decisive victory at Chattanooga.²⁰ But the second event would unhinge the lynchpin of Meade's entire campaign plan-the element of surprise. When Lee's

scouts determined that Federal forces at Culpeper (Newton's First Army Corps) had received 8 days rations and were preparing to move, Lee correctly deduced that Meade intended to advance and alerted his corps commanders to be ready to move along the Orange Turnpike and Orange Plank Road and strike Meade when he crossed the Rapidan.²¹ Meade had lost the crucial element of operational surprise even before his movement to contact began on 26 November.

26 November

On this Thanksgiving Day Meade's ambitious scheme to cross the Rapidan with his five corps and mass them at Robertson's Tavern by 1200 hours floundered. Warren's Second Corps promptly reached the Germanna Ford by 0930 hours and Sykes' Fifth Corps appeared at Culpeper Ford an hour later, but Meade had to delay their crossing due to the slowness of the French's Third Corps. Although he had the shortest distance to travel, French did not reach Jacob's Ford until 1155 hours.²² Not knowing Lee's intentions, Meade delayed the crossing of Warren and Sykes so as not to isolate them south of the river.

Blame for this delay goes to French. His corps started from its bivouac an hour later than the other corps. The Sixth Corps was in motion before dawn: however, when Sedgwick arrived at French's camp he found the Third Corps still asleep with tents unstruck and wagons unloaded for movement.²³ French claimed late receipt of Meade's order to advance and the tardiness of

his Second Division commander, BG Henry Prince. In any event, Jacob's Ford became a chokepoint. Narrow approach roads and the steep muddy banks of the Rappahannock prevented French's artillery from crossing. Meade's own headquarters train also blocked the advance of the Third Corps Artillery. The Engineers arrived to throw a pontoon bridge across the river, but were one pontoon short. By the time the extra pontoon was brought up, the Third Corps did not start crossing the river until 1600 hours. At 1630 hours Meade diverted the Third Corps artillery to Germanna Ford to relieve the pressure at the chokepoint and expedite French's crossing operation.²⁴ A thorough reconnaissance could have prevented these delays.

Warren also experienced engineering delays at Germanna Ford that required the building of a trestle. As evening approached the Second, Third, and Fifth Army Corps had crossed the Rappahannock and progressed two to four miles into the interior, but the First and Sixth Corps remained north of the river. Because of the crossing delays and with darkness imminent, Meade suspended operations for the night far short of the day's objectives.²⁵ Thanksgiving dinner for Meade's army consisted of a rapidly consumed meal of field rations-hardtack and salt pork.²⁶

At this point Meade should have realized that his failure to maintain rapid movement seriously compromised his ability to achieve surprise. Nevertheless, he thought the army still had a chance of success if he could make

significant progress the next day. Accordingly, he stuck to his plan and ordered the corps to concentrate at Robertson's Tavern the next day.²⁷

Meanwhile, BG Thomas L. Rosser's Cavalry Brigade of MG Wade Hampton's Cavalry Division had observed the Federal crossings at Culpeper Mine Ford and communicated this information to Lee. At this point Lee could not decide whether Meade was advancing toward Richmond via Spottsylvania Court House or preparing to attack the Confederate right. He decided to attack Meade's rear if the Army of the Potomac proceeded to Richmond, and to seek decisive battle if Meade attacked his right flank.²⁸ In any event Lee began pushing Ewell's Corps (temporarily commanded by Early) eastward along the Orange Turnpike and Hill's Corps along the Orange Plank Road.²⁸

27 November

The specific instructions to the corps for 27 November required them to move by 0700 hours. Warren was to march via the Orange Turnpike towards Old Verdiersville. French was to advance on Robertson's Tavern and concentrate there with Warren. Sykes was to proceed on the Orange Plank Road towards New Verdiersville and Newton would follow him. Sedgwick would follow French, leaving one division to guard river until the combat trains crossed at Germanna Ford (see Appendix 8). The combat field trains under Ingalls would cross at the Culpeper Mine and Ely's Fords and remain in the rear of the army guarded by Merritt's

Cavalry Division.30

For Meade the 27th would be a frustrating repetition of the previous day. Warren's Corps made good progress and reached Robertson's Tavern by 1000 hours, driving elements of Early's Corps before him. Meade arrived on the scene and told Warren to hold in place until French arrived. He then spent much of the day waiting for French. Once again the Third Corps was tardy and could not cover the 5 miles between its bivouac and Robertson's Tavern in the time allotted. This time the lead division, again commanded by Prince, could not pick the right road to take and French did little to correct the error.³¹ At 1100 and 1115 hours Meade sent French frantic messages urging him forward to join with Warren.³²

Early did not attack Warren at Locust Grove (i.e., Robertson's Tavern) because he considered it a strong position and he was waiting for MG Edward "Allegheny" Johnson's Division to arrive.³³ Meanwhile, after some cavalry skirmishes, Sykes had advanced along the Orange Plank Road as far as New Hope Church. By 1200 hours Meade became concerned about the 2 mile separation between Warren and Sykes and told Sykes not to advance past the road to Robertson's Tavern near New Hope Church.³⁴ He was probably less concerned with Sykes position than with Warren's predicament, for Newton was following closely on Sykes heels.

French came in light contact with elements of Early's

Corps at 1200 hours, which further stalled him in linking up with Warren. By 1400 hours Meade was furious at the French's continued delay and, according to Patrick, "became greatly out of temper about it."³⁵ At 1600 hours the major meeting engagement of the day occurred at Payne's Farm when French's Corps collided with Johnson's Division. Even though he outnumbered Johnson by 3:1 French remained in a defensive posture. Had Sixth Corps forces had been brought to bear in this action the ratio would have been 6:1. The action claimed 952 Federal and 498 Confederate casualties.³⁶ This brilliant hasty attack by Johnson offset a considerable Federal manpower advantage and was the high point of the campaign for the Army of Northern Virginia.

Meade still sought to concentrate the army in the vicinity of Robertson's Tavern. Accordingly, after the action at Payne's Farm he ordered the Sixth Corps to bypass the Third Corps and proceed to Robertson's Tavern. He also ordered Sykes Fifth Corps to north towards the Tavern.³⁷ Instead, of quickly converging on Robertson's Tavern and attacking dispersed Confederate forces Meade's army had wasted another day characterized by sluggish movement, unsynchronized maneuver, uninspired leadership, and the failure to capitalize on tactical opportunities. Had French and Sedgwick converged on Robertson's Tavern with Warren by 1000 hours, Meade might have engaged Lee before the Confederates could concentrate. In the final

analysis, all the actions of the day were corps fights and depended on the aggressiveness of the individual corps commanders. Meade cautiously remained at his headquarters and tried to direct operations as best he could. The anxiety and stress he probably felt at this time is the plight of all operational level commanders.

During the night Meade formed a line of battle perpendicular to the Orange Turnpike with the First Corps on the left, the Second Corps in the center, and the Sixth Corps on the right. The Third and Fifth Corps were in reserve. Having lost the bid for an envelopment, he now had one option-a frontal attack. Meanwhile, Lee was finally convinced his army was Meade's objective; therefore, he withdrew his army to the high ground west of the Mine Run creek and began constructing defensive works in anticipation of Meade's assault.³⁸

28 November

This day began with a surprise. At first light Meade's Corps advanced to find only a few pickets and vacated trenches. This startled Meade.³⁹ When he examined the new enemy positions, he found them very formidable and remarked, "we have got another Gettysburg in front of us."⁴⁰ Lee's new and strongly fortified positions were on the high ground west of Mine Run at least 100 feet above the creek level. To get to these positions attacking troops would have to cross 1,000 yards of open terrain. Heavy rains delayed Meade's army in

assuming attack positions on the east side of Mine Run.⁴¹

Meade judged that Lee's position behind Mine Run was stronger than his own had been at Gettysburg. Lee's line was semi-circular, which would enable him to fight on interior lines. As he himself had done at Gettysburg, Lee could easily shift his forces to meet assaults anywhere along his line.⁴² For this reason Meade ruled out a direct frontal attack.

Towards evening Warren suggested a new option. He could shift to the left and find terrain that would enable the army to attack Lee's right. Meade pounced on this idea and reinforced Warren with BG Henry D. Terry's Third Division (Sixth Corps) to accomplish the task.⁴³ He probably had great confidence in his young protege after his role on Little Round Top at Gettysburg and the recent action at Bristoe Station. Warren's specific mission was to threaten Lee's right, discover a "vulnerable point of attack" and, "if necessary to continue the movement, threatening to turn his right."⁴⁴ Meade directed the remaining Corps commanders to examine their fronts for possible assaults.⁴⁵ To Meade's credit he still had the tenacity to force a general engagement.

29 November

Although the rains stopped, the weather turned cold and icy. Many soldiers who had thrown their overcoats and blankets away during the approach march began to suffer the effects of hypothermia.⁴⁶

During the day Meade received reports from the Corps commanders on the feasibility of attacking to their fronts. All were positive to the idea except French who "deemed his attack impracticable."⁴⁷ Around 1800 hours, Meade decided to attack Lee's left flank with the Fifth and Sixth Corps, the center with First and Third Corps, and the right with Second Corps.⁴⁸ At a conference of Corps Commanders at 2000 hours Warren boasted his conviction that Lee's right lay open and that he could successfully assault it if reinforced.⁴⁹ Meade altered his plan by giving Warren two of French's divisions. Therefore, the attack plan became an assault on Lee's flanks with a demonstration by First and Third Corps (minus) on the center.

Here Meade made an audacious and probably "heated" call, by giving the junior corps commander the main attack and providing him with six divisions (28,000 men) to accomplish the task.⁵⁰ Either Meade implicitly trusted Warren's skill or he was perturbed over French's poor performance during the campaign. In any event Meade accepted Warren's estimate of the situation without confirming it with a personal reconnaissance. He ordered that the assault would commence at 0800 hours on 30 November with a one hour artillery preparation. The guns in the center would be the signal to begin the flank assaults. During the night of 29 November the Fifth and Sixth Corps silently moved into attack positions opposite

the point of attack and the two divisions from the Third Corps joined Warren for his part of the assault.⁵¹

30 November

When Warren returned to his corps to prepare for the assault he decided to make a personal reconnaissance of the Confederate works. This pre-dawn reconnaissance went beyond the picket line and, "wrapped in his cloak to escape observation, he actually crept within the Confederate lines."⁵² What he found made him reverse completely his conviction that he could make a successful assault.

During the night the Confederates had transformed their commanding position into an impregnable bastion with hastily constructed trenches and breastworks for infantry (see Appendix 9). In front of the trenches a thick growth of pines was felled as abatis.⁵³ To get to these elevated positions Federal infantry would have to advance over open ground for distances of up to 1,000 yards which included crossing the marshy ground surrounding Mine Run creek. Warren estimated it would take his attacking columns eight minutes at a run to traverse the distance to the enemy positions. Worst of all they would receive intense rifle and artillery fire every step of the way.⁵⁴ He was convinced that the assault would fail and end in senseless slaughter.

Warren's troops made the same judgment and took precautions by pinning pieces of paper to their tunics in

case they were killed-in-action (KIA). The troops may have been afraid, but they were resigned to their fate. As SC Alexander Hays, commander of Third Division (Second Corps), walked his lines he asked a soldier of the First Minnesota Regiment his evaluation of the impending assault. Without hesitation the soldier declared the assault, "a damned sight worse than Fredericksburg...I am going as far as I can travel: but we can't get more than two-thirds of the way up the hill."⁵⁵

Warren seized the moment and in effect made the decision that ended the Mine Run Campaign. Viewing the assault as hopeless, he simply canceled it. Unfortunately, he did not first notify Meade. The cannonade for the assault had begun in the center of the Union line promptly at 0800 hours, and Sedgwick was chomping at the bit to begin the infantry assault against the Confederate left at 0900 hours. At 0850 hours a Second Corps staff officer delivered a dispatch to Meade telling him that Warren had canceled the assault.⁵⁶ Patrick reports that this news "was a terrible shock to all."⁵⁷ Meade's immediate reaction was to dispatch aides to prevent Sedgwick from kicking off his assault.⁵⁸ Fortunately, they were successful.

Undoubtedly Meade was stunned by this news, especially with a junior corps commander making such a momentous decision without consulting him. Curiously, he waited until between 1000 and 1100 hours before visiting

Warren.⁵⁹ Perhaps this delay was intentional because it permitted Meade's temper to cool. Humphrey reports that he went to see Warren in order to plan an attack later in the day. "but found it impracticable."⁶⁰ Probably, Warren simply showed Meade the Confederate positions, thereby, letting Meade make up his own mind. Meade accepted Warren's view and in so doing made a very courageous and highly moral decision not to spill his soldiers blood needlessly. Following a council of war that night he returned the two Third Corps divisions to the center, the Fifth Corps to the left flank, and the Sixth Corps to the right.⁶¹

1 December

On 1 December Meade considered his options. First, the strength of the Confederate line ruled out a frontal assault. Second, a move further around Lee's right toward Orange Court House would mean he would have to abandon his line of communication along the Orange and Alexandria Railroad. Therefore, he ruled out this option. Third, he was restricted from occupying Fredericksburg because of Halleck's refusal to let him change his line of communication to the Aquia Creek line. In Meade's mind that left one option-withdraw north across the Rapidan and establish winter quarters.

Later, testifying before Congress, Meade cited some additional factors. He stated that he had consumed more than half of his supplies and the poor weather was

affecting the trafficability of the roads. He also admitted that he had failed in his plans to attack the Army of Northern Virginia both before and after Lee had concentrated his forces.⁶²

Accordingly, Meade issued orders to the corps commanders in an Army Circular dated 1 December that ordered the withdrawal of the army that night north of the Rapidan.⁶³

ENDNOTES

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3. Sparks, p. 311.
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5. OR, Volume 29, Part I, p. 13.
6. Joint Conduct, p. 344.
7. OR, Volume 29, Part I, pp. 480-481.
8. Humphreys, p. 51.
9. OR, Volume 29, Part I, p. 480.
10. Ibid., p. 13-14.
11. Swinton, p. 392.
12. Humphreys, p. 50.
13. Sparks, p. 306.
14. OR, Volume 29, Part I, p. 229.
15. Luvaas and Nye, p. 17.
16. Humphreys, p. 51.
17. Richard E. Winslow III, General John Sedgwick: The Story of a Union Corps Commander, p. 126.
18. Graham and Skoch, p. 42.
19. OR, Volume 29, Part I, pp. 488-489.
20. Ibid., p. 489.
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22. Ibid., p. 45.
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38. Graham and Skoch, p. 59.
39. Ibid., p. 69.
40. Winslow, p. 128.
41. OR, Volume 29, Part I, p. 16.
42. Stine, p. 591.
43. OR, Volume 29, Part I, p. 16.
44. Humphreys, p. 64.
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46. Winslow, p. 129.
47. Humphreys, p. 65.
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53. William Swinton, Campaigns of the Army of the Potomac, p. 395.

54. OR, Volume 29, Part I, p. 698.

55. Francis A. Walker, History of the Second Army Corps in the Army of the Potomac, p. 383.

56. Humphreys, p. 66.

57. Sparks, p. 317.

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62. Joint Conduct, pp. 346-347.

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CHAPTER VIII

CAMPAIGN RESULTS AND AFTERMATH

RESULTS

An exhausted and frustrated Army of the Potomac crossed back over the Rapidan River on the night of 2 December 1863. Meade was given the choice by Washington to establish winter quarters for the army either between the Rapidan and Rappahannock Rivers or North of the Rappahannock. Halleck preferred that the army encamp North of the Rappahannock to be closer to the Washington supply depots, but according to Humphreys, Meade elected to spend the winter within the Iron Triangle "as an opportunity might occur during the winter for some enterprise against the enemy that would serve to retrieve the failure of the recent operation."¹

Meanwhile, the Army of Northern Virginia moved out of the Mine Run line and placed a small holding force in entrenchments along the Rapidan. The bulk of Lee's army set up winter quarters several miles south of the Rapidan on healthier ground.² There it would remain until the advent of the Spring campaign season in April 1864.

Lyman attributed the campaign failure to "slowness and want of detail" and he further expressed the frustration of many Union officers when he said, "We have fought for two and a half years, but it takes no wiseacre to see that we have much to learn."³ Meade, however, concentrated

blame for the failure on the Third Army Corps and on 3 December directed French to submit a detailed written account of his actions.⁴

French's lengthy response generally focused blame on Prince, Second Division Commander. However, he did not address the larger issues of his corps slow-paced movement, his lack of detailed route reconnaissance, or his failure to overrun Johnson's Division at Payne's Farm despite holding a 6:1 strength advantage.⁵

On 30 November, even before the army's withdrawal Patrick had attributed French's poor performance to alcohol abuse, observing that, "French...has been tight a good part of the time during this movement."⁶ Meade was quoted in the *New York Tribune* of 7 December as charging that French "was probably too drunk to know or do his duty," but denied ever making such a statement.⁷ Given Meade's propensity not to talk to reporters, the more likely source of the *Tribune* quote was Provost Marshall Patrick.

Compared to the horrendous casualties suffered by both armies at such places as Antietam, Fredericksburg, and Gettysburg, the losses during the Mine Run Campaign may seem trifling. Total losses for the Army of Potomac during the campaign were 2,094 and are broken down as follows: 261 KIA, 1,460 wounded in action (WIA), and 373 missing. These losses constituted 2% of the total Federal forces (96,000) engaged. Total losses for the Army of

Northern Virginia were 2,826 and included the following: 118 KIA, 651 WIA, and 2,057 missing. These losses constituted 5% of the total Confederate forces (56,000) engaged.⁸

Although the gross numbers were relatively small, the fact remains that the Confederates could not afford to engage in attrition warfare against Union forces. Perhaps the most horrific aspect of the Mine Run casualty lists is that they included instances of soldiers freezing to death in the bitter cold.⁹ Additionally, it was reported that some of the wounded died of the extreme cold while being evacuated inside army ambulances. One final word on casualties is noteworthy from a leadership viewpoint. On 16 December, BG John Buford, the highly competent Union cavalry leader, died of typhoid fever which he had contracted during the campaign. Patrick reports that, "President Lincoln, on being told that he must die, made him a Major General, for Gettysburg!"¹⁰

Northern politicians and newspaper men had a field day castigating the army leadership for the failed campaign especially in light of Grant's decisive victory at Chattanooga on 25 November. Meade's adversarial relations with the press did not help his cause. Press reaction was predictable. The headline story in the Washington Star was entitled "The Army of the Potomac and Its Hesitating Generals" and stated, "so long as our army in this quarter continues to be guided by its present counsels in the

field, it is now clear that it will fail to command public confidence."11

Meade thought his removal from command imminent; however, he faced his fate stoically. Writing to his wife on 7 December he stated:

Today I have sent in my official report in which I have told the plain truth, acknowledged the movement was a failure, but claimed the causes were not in my plans, but in the want of support and cooperation on the part of subordinates...I see the Herald is constantly harping on the assertion that Gettysburg was fought by the corps commanders and the common soldiers, and that no generalship was displayed. I suppose after awhile it will be discovered I was not at Gettysburg at all.12

All the news in the papers was not bad for Meade, however, on 12 December he wrote his wife to say that, "the mail has just come in and bring today's Chronicle, which announces I am not to be relieved."13

AFTERMATH

On 3 March 1864 Ulysses S. Grant was appointed by Congress as a Lieutenant General and named as the General-in-Chief of all Union armies; therefore, he would decide who would command the Army of the Potomac.

It was left to Grant to devise and direct the cohesive military strategy that would end the war. Grant disregarded all of Meade's critics and retained him in command of the Army of the Potomac. Ultimately, Grant decided to stay outside of Washington and maintained his

headquarters close to Meade's army headquarters.¹⁴ Grant and Meade maintained an effective and cordial working relationship to the end of the war. Even Dana, one of his harsher critics, admitted that Meade got along with Grant "always perfectly, because he had the first virtue of a soldier—that is, obedience to orders."¹⁵

On 5 March 1864 Meade testified before the Congressional Committee on the Conduct of the War, chaired by Congressman Benjamin F. Wade of Ohio. An excerpt of Meade's testimony is as follows:

Q. Are you heartily sustained by your corps commanders under all circumstances, so far as you believe?

A. I believe I have been; I have no complaint to make of want of assistance from all my corps commanders, except what is stated in my evidence in reference to Mine Run.¹⁶

This testimony reveals Meade's loyalty to his comrades-in-arms (see Appendix 10) despite their desultory performance during the Mine Run Campaign.

However, two weeks after giving his testimony to Congress, Meade reorganized the army. Recognizing his operational span of control problem Meade decided to form three corps of four divisions each. The First and Third Army Corps were deactivated and their units distributed within the army. The remaining corps of 20,000 men each would be the Second Army Corps, commanded by the recovered Hancock; the Fifth Army Corps, commanded by Warren; and the Sixth Army Corps, commanded by Sedgwick.

The Cavalry Corps would eventually be commanded by MG Philip Sheridan.¹⁷ There was a hidden agenda in this army reorganization because it prevented Meade's antagonist, Sickles, from returning to the army as a corps commander. The displaced corps commanders were transferred to other duties with Sykes, Newton, and the displaced Cavalry Corps Commander, MG Alfred Pleasonton going to the Western Theater. MG French was relegated to garrison duty in Maryland. Humphreys disagreed with Meade on the reorganization because he felt that the army should have retained five corps of 15,000 men each.¹⁸ Humphreys pointed out that the corps commander's tactical span of control over his divisions was increased by the new organization. Considering the tactical command and control challenges already facing Civil War generals, Humphreys' point was well taken.

ENDNOTES

1. Humphreys, p. 71.
2. Ibid.
3. Agassiz, p. 59.
4. OR, Volume 29, Part I, p. 746.
5. Ibid., pp. 736-743.
6. Sparks, p. 317.
7. OR, Volume 29, Part I, p. 747.
8. Graham and Skoch, pp. 101-103.
9. Winslow, p. 131.
10. Sparks, pp. 316 & 323.
11. Winslow, p. 132.
12. Meade, p. 160.
13. Ibid., p. 161.
14. Cleaves, pp. 224-225.
15. Dana, p. 189.
16. Joint Conduct, p. 347.
17. Cleaves, p. 232.
18. Ibid.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

CONCLUSIONS

Meade failed to bring his army into decisive combat because three significant operational opportunities alluded him. First, he did not quickly follow Lee's army back across the Rappahannock River after the engagement at Bristoe Station. Second, he did not push a full pursuit of the Confederate Army after the stunning successes at Rappahannock Station and Kelly's Ford. Finally, the loss of operational surprise at Mine Run caused by the failure of his corps to concentrate on time at Robertson's Tavern thwarted Meade's operational concept of enveloping and destroying Hill's and Ewell's Corps in detail.

While Meade did not exhibit the degree of aggressiveness, self-confidence, and tenacity of purpose expected by his wartime critics, he was nonetheless a very capable soldier and competent commander. Grant was a shrewd judge of military character. If he did not have confidence in the abilities of Meade, he would not have retained him in command of the Army of the Potomac.

The Mine Run Campaign was a living laboratory for Meade because it was his first opportunity to direct and maneuver large units (i.e., corps) in offensive operations. Meade showed that he understood the operational level of war. He did not fully develop the

battlefield using thorough reconnaissance, but by modern standards his operations plans were all essentially sound. His plans, however, may have been too complex for his corps commanders considering the state of command & control during the Civil War. Additionally, he may not have fully understood the exhaustion of the troops caused by the severe weather conditions encountered during the later stages of the campaign.

Unfortunately, Meade was plagued with poor mission execution by his corps commanders during the Mine Run Campaign. As a group they appeared incapable of overcoming the adversity of the battlefield caused by the "friction" of war. Sluggishness of movement by the army during the campaign negated Meade's efforts to use deception and achieve surprise.

Meade had a excellent understanding of the importance of operational sustainment. His proposal to shift his LOC to the Fredericksburg/Aquia Landing line proved prophetic and was a lost operational opportunity. Conversely, his extreme concern for the maintenance of his LOC with Washington tempered his ability to take operational risks.

Even though Meade did not have a 3:1 superiority over the Army of Northern Virginia (the actual ratio was 1.7:1) his plan at Mine Run might have succeeded in destroying Lee's two corps in detail if surprise had been achieved.

On 30 November 1863 Meade clearly made a very courageous and highly moral decision when he suspended the

assault of the army against the prepared positions of the Confederate Army above Mine Run Creek.

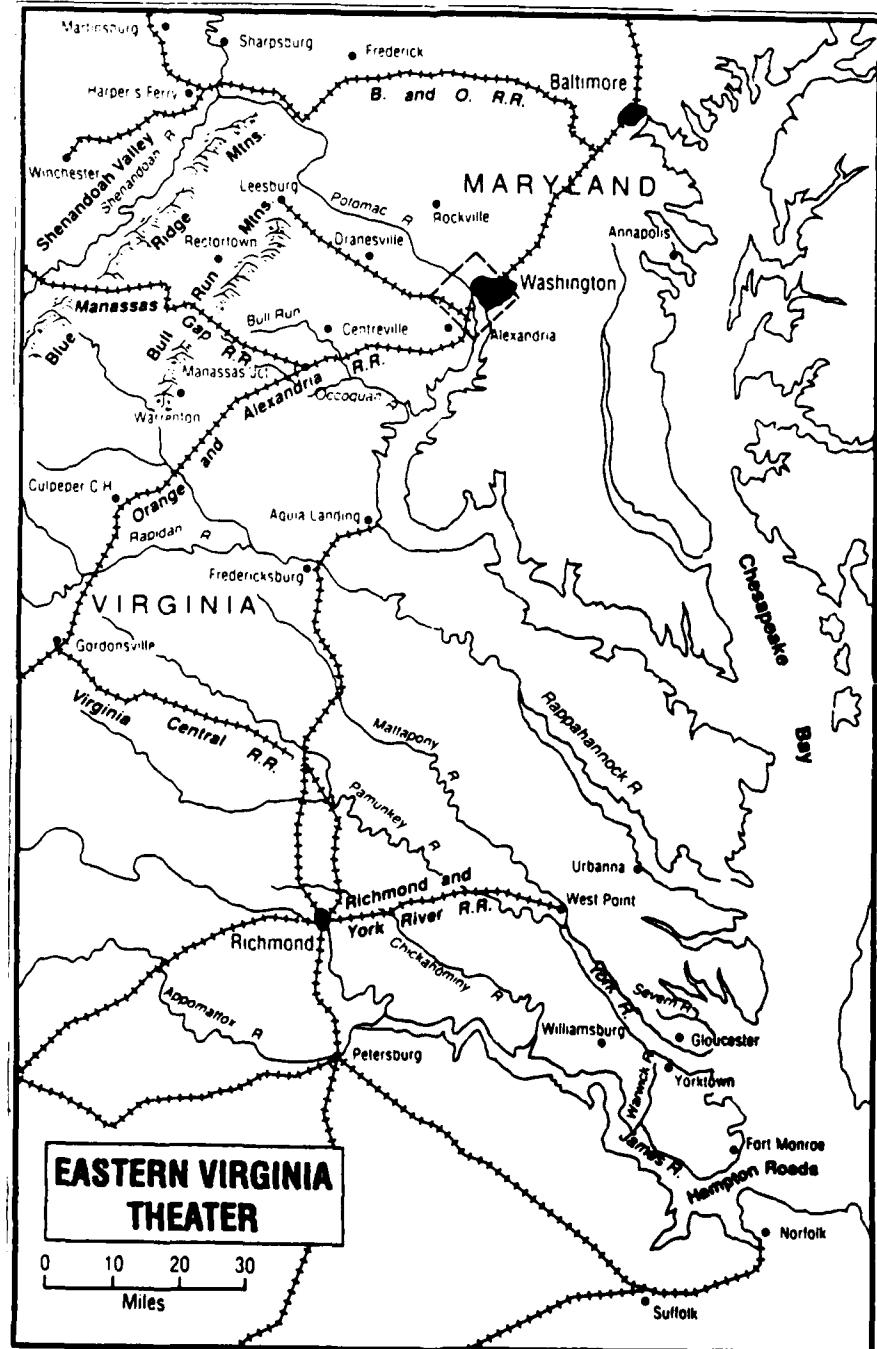
In the final analysis Meade accomplished something very significant during this campaign. He wrested the operational initiative from Lee, thereby, preventing the Confederate Army from achieving any decisive result at the expense of the Army of the Potomac. His predecessors MG George B. McClellan, MG Ambrose E. Burnside, and MG Joseph Hooker certainly could not claim this distinction.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. An operational commander must be able to sort out and interpret the strategic/operational guidance he receives from the National Command Authority and apply it to the operational design of his campaign plan.
2. Operational commanders must be ready to make critical moral judgments in addition to all the other complex decisions they face.
3. Operational commanders must be flexible enough to accept new information and make appropriate changes to existing plans and schemes of maneuver.
4. An operational commander must understand the effects of battle on soldiers, units, and leaders if he is to succeed in his campaign design.
5. The importance of reconnaissance, preparation of the battlefield, surprise, and deception cannot be understated.
6. Sometimes to achieve success on the battlefield,

the operational commander must be willing to take risks that may even endanger his logistical tail.

7. The American Civil War is a rich source of campaigns for the study and analysis of the operational level of war.



Appendix 3

Order of Battle
Army of Northern Virginia
(31 October 1863)

Commanding General-GEN ROBERT E. LEE

Second Army Corps: LTG R.S. EWELL (MG J.A. EARLY)
Early's Division: MG J.A. Early (BG H.T. Hays)
Johnson's Division: MG E. Johnson
Rodes's Division: MG R.E. Rodes
Third Army Corps: LTG A.P. HILL
Anderson's Division: MG R.H. Anderson
Heth's Division: MG H. Heth
Wilcox's Division: MG C.M. Wilcox
Cavalry Corps: MG J.E.B. STUART
Hampton's Division: MG W. Hampton
Fitz Lee's Division: MG F. Lee
Artillery: BG W.N. PENDLETON
Second Corps: BG A.L. Long
Third Corps: COL R.L. Walker

Appendix 4

Order of Battle
Army of the Potomac
(20 November 1863)

Commanding General-MG GEORGE G. MEADE

First Army Corps: MG J. NEWTON
 1st Division: BG S. Meredith
 2nd Division: BG J.C. Robinson
 3rd Division: BG J.R. Kenly
 Artillery: COL C.S. Wainwright

Second Army Corps: MG G.K. WARREN
 1st Division: BG J.C. Caldwell
 2nd Division: BG A.S. Webb
 3rd Division: BG A. Hays
 Artillery: LTC J.A. Monroe

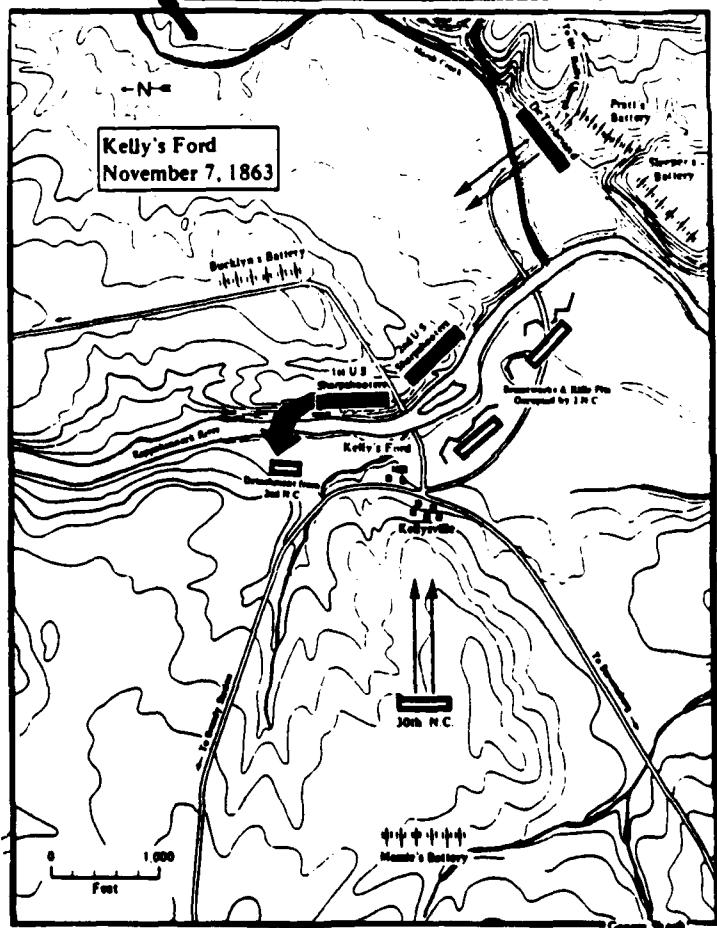
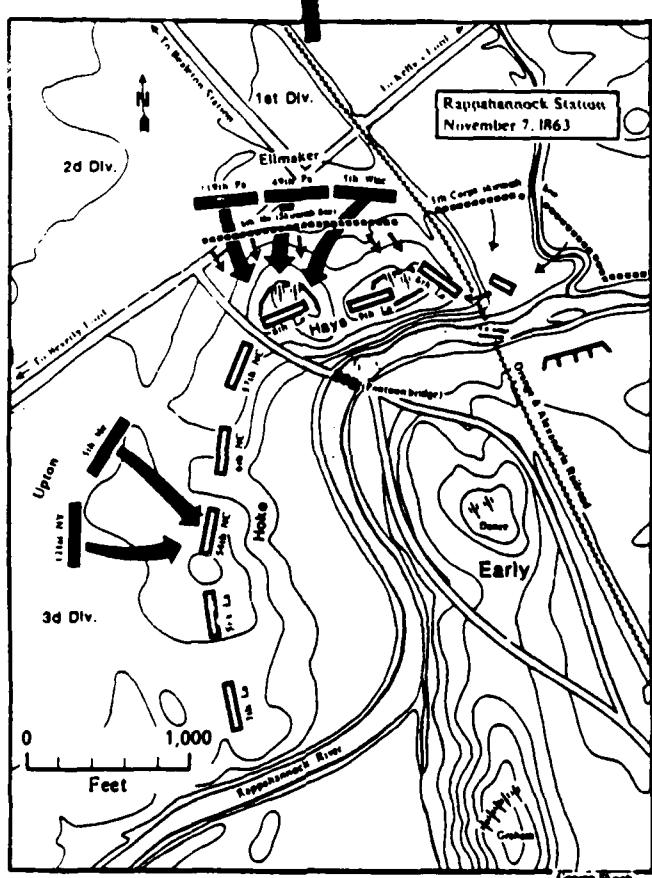
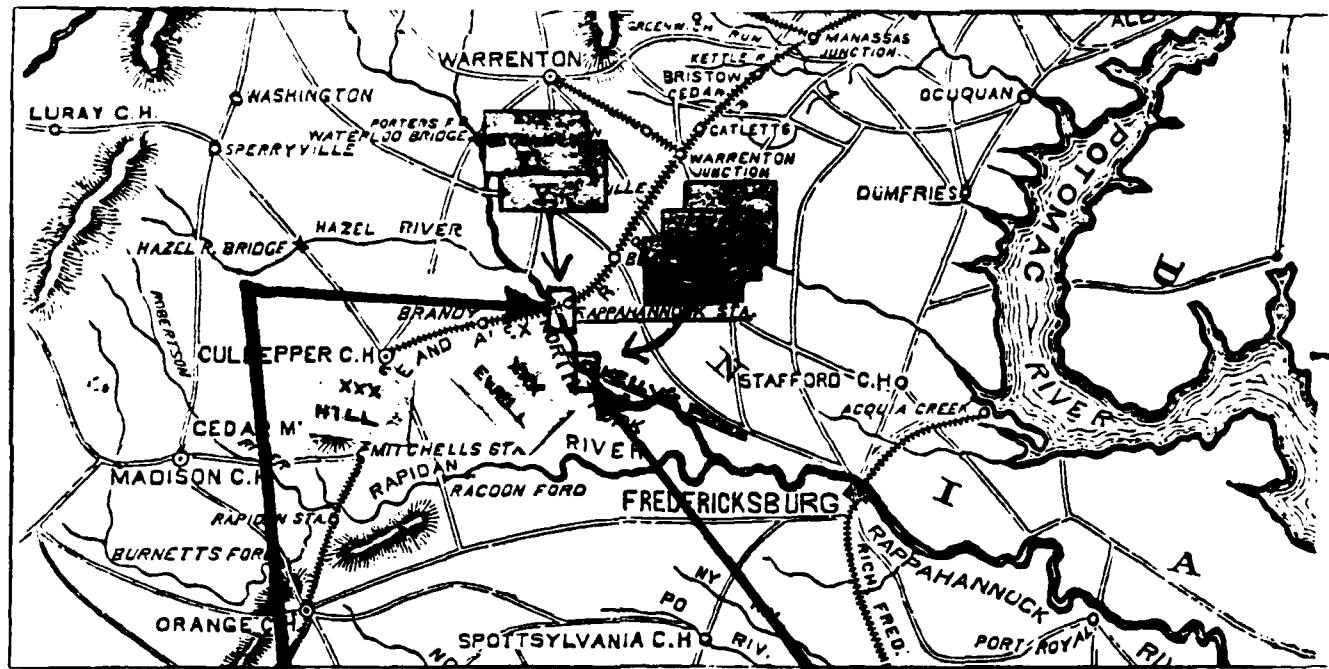
Third Army Corps: MG W.H. FRENCH
 1st Division: MG D.B. Birney
 2nd Division: BG H. Prince
 3rd Division: BG J.B. Carr
 Artillery: CPT G.B. Randolph

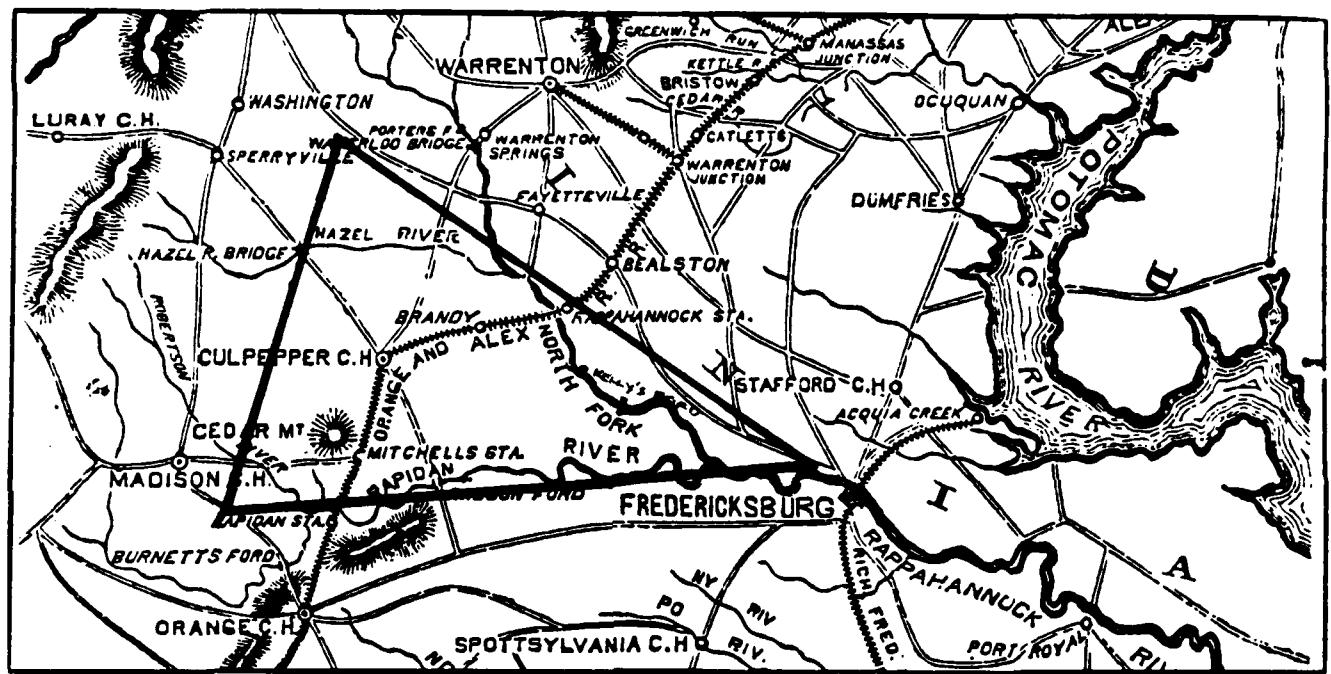
Fifth Army Corps: MG G. SYKES
 1st Division: BG J.J. Bartlett
 2nd Division: BG R.B. Ayres
 3rd Division: BG S.W. Crawford
 Artillery: CPT A.P. Martin

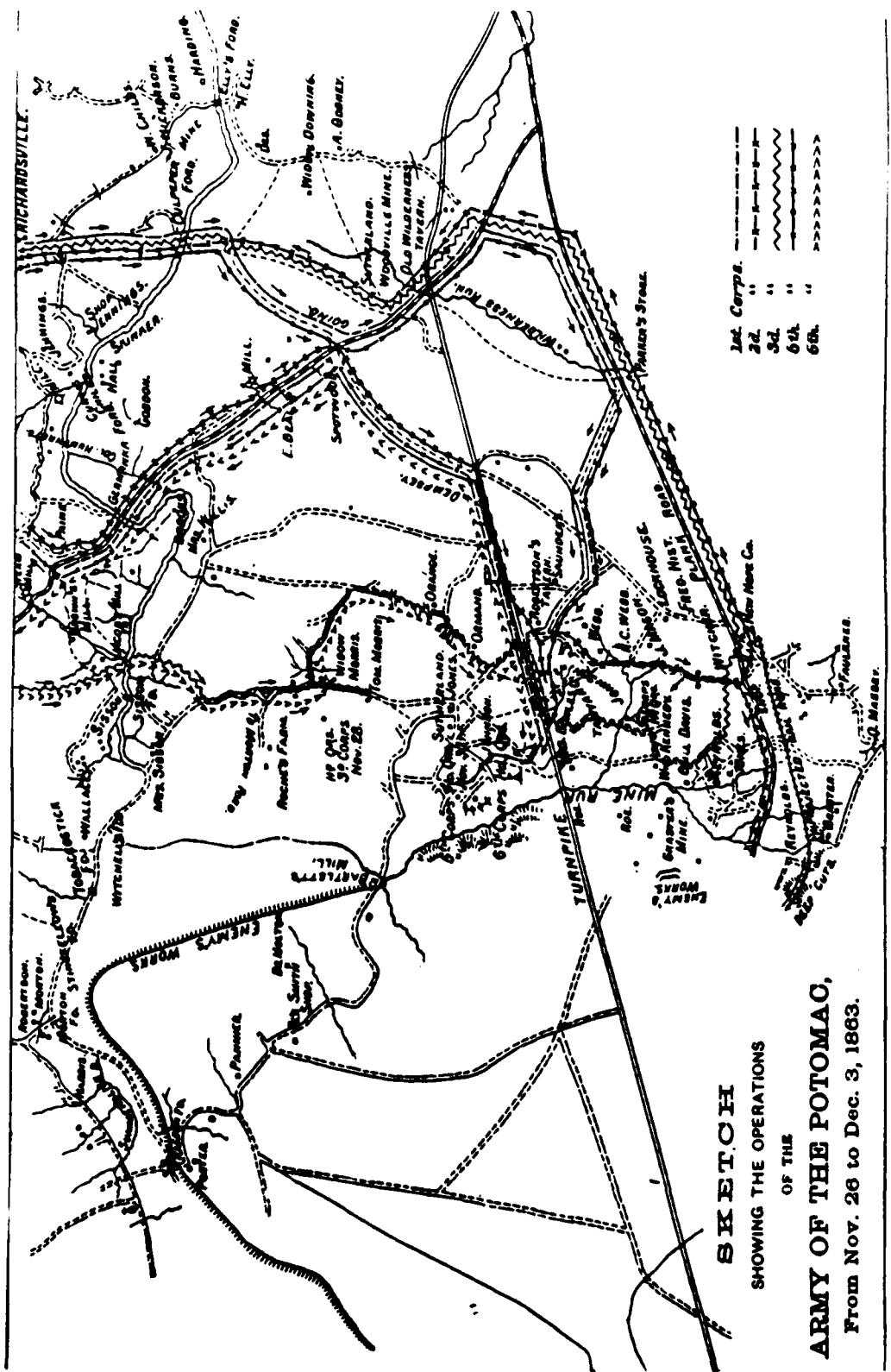
Sixth Army Corps: MG J. SEDGWICK
 1st Division: BG H.C. Wright
 2nd Division: BG A.P. Howe
 3rd Division: BG H.D. Terry
 Artillery: COL C. H. Tompkins

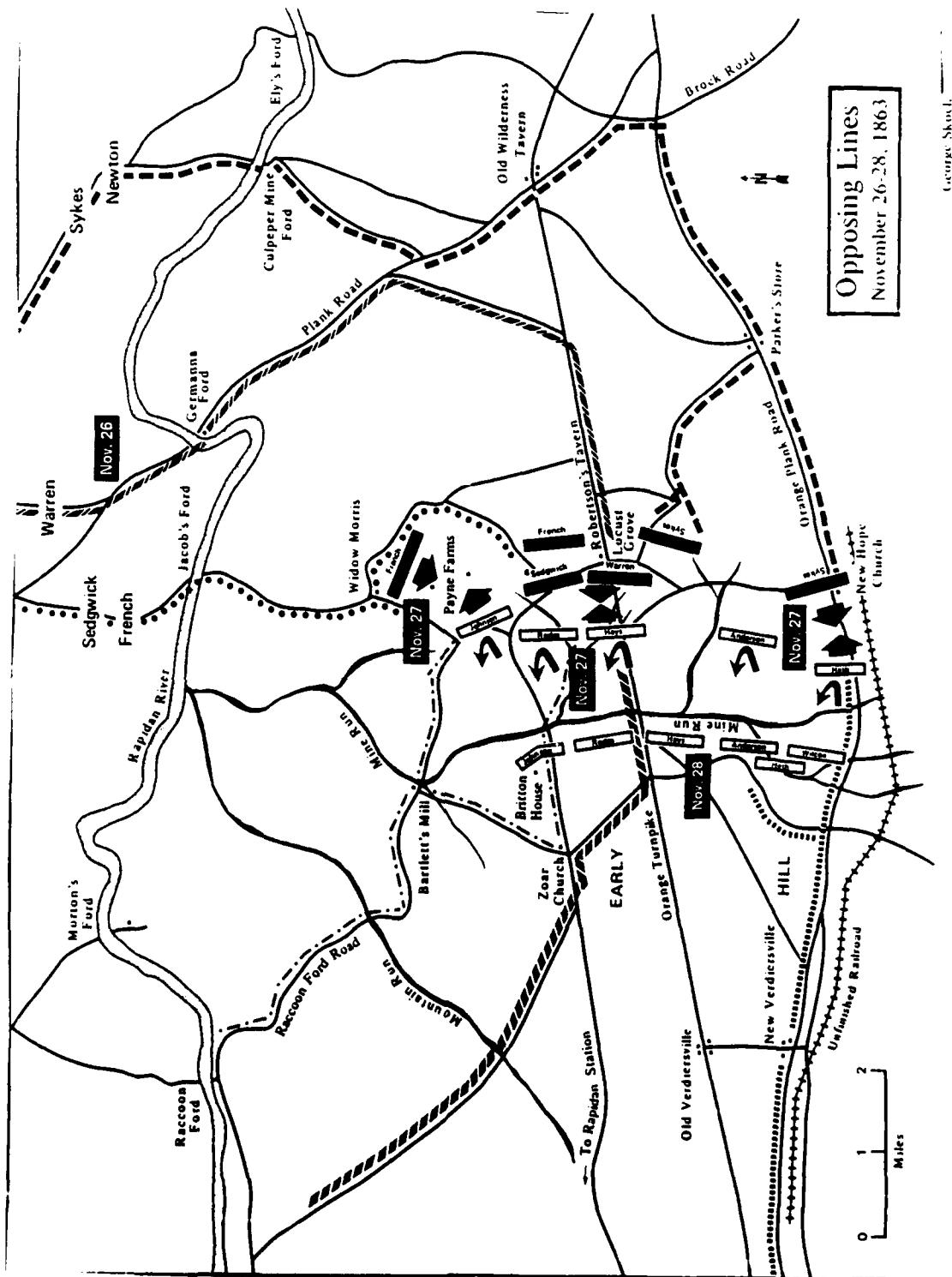
Cavalry Corps: MG A. PLEASONTON
 1st Division: BG J. Buford (BG W. Merritt)
 2nd Division: BG D. Mcgregg
 3rd Division: BG G.A. Custer

Artillery: BG H.J. Hunt
Artillery Reserve: BG R. O. Tyler









Opposing Lines
November 30, 1863

**Opposing Lines
November 30, 1863**

Map showing the opposing lines on November 30, 1863, during the Battle of Fredericksburg. The map includes the following details:

- Highways and Roads:** Orange Turnpike, Orange Plank Road, Catharpin Road, and the Unfinished Railroad.
- Key Locations:** Ewell (Early), Zoar Church, Britton House, Jones, Carter, Brown, Nelson, Anderson, Rodes, Sedgwick (VI), Newton (I), Locus Grove, New Hope Church, and Richards Shop.
- Union Forces (Black Squares):**
 - Anderson
 - Blaney (1st Div., III Corps)
 - Caldwell (1st Div., III Corps)
 - French (III)
 - Hays (2nd Div., III Corps)
 - Prince Carr (3rd Div., III Corps)
 - Terry (3rd Div., VI Corps)
 - Warren (II)
- Confederate Forces (Black Squares):**
 - A. P. Hill (1st Div., II Corps)
 - Anderson
 - Blaney (1st Div., III Corps)
 - Caldwell (1st Div., III Corps)
 - French (III)
 - Hays (2nd Div., III Corps)
 - Prince Carr (3rd Div., III Corps)
 - Terry (3rd Div., VI Corps)
 - Warren (II)
- Payne Farms:** Indicated by black squares.
- George Skoch:** Indicated by black squares.
- Scale:** 0 to 1 mile.
- Note:** Reports for Federal artillery are incomplete.

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Reports for Federal artillery are incomplete.)

APPENDIX 19: FIELD PHOTOGRAPH OF MEADE AND STAFF



(L-R: Warren, French, Meade, Hunt, Humphreys & Sykes)

Appendix 11: Endnotes for Appendices

Appendix 1: Sears, p. 152.

Appendix 2: Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States-Massachusetts, Volume 63, Number 3112 (hereafter referred to as MOLLUS-Mass).

Appendix 3: OR, Volume 29, Part I, pp. 817-822.

Appendix 4: Ibid., pp. 667-677.

Appendix 5: Graham and Skoch, pp. 14 & 25.
Wert, p. 44.

Appendix 6: Ibid., p. 44.

Appendix 7: OR, Volume 29, Part I, p. 19.

Appendix 8: Graham and Skoch, Map Insert.

Appendix 9: Ibid., p. 69.

Appendix 10: MOLLUS-Mass, Volume 31, Number 1503.

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